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THE UNCHANGING CHRIST

BY THE REV.
ALEX McLAREN, D.D., D.Litt.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

CONTENTS.

I.

PAGE

THE UNCHANGING CHRIST 1

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."—HEB. xiii. 8.

II.

THE SECRET OF IMMORTAL YOUTH 12

"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."—ISA. xl. 30, 31.

III.

NEXT THE THRONE 24

"To sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father."—MATT. xx. 23.

IV.

PAGE

THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY 36

"Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. (3) Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O mighty one, thy glory and thy majesty. (4) And in thy majesty ride on prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. (5) Thine arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under thee; they are in the heart of the king's enemies. (6) Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of equity is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. (7) Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."—Ps. xlv. 2-7 (R.V.).

V.

THE PORTRAIT OF THE BRIDE 48

"(10) Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; (11) So shall the King desire thy beauty: for He is Thy Lord; and worship thou Him. (12) And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour. (13) The King's daughter within the palace is all glorious: her clothing is inwrought with gold. (14) She shall be led unto the King in broidered work; the virgins, her companions, that follow her shall be brought unto thee. (15) With gladness and rejoicing shall they be led; they shall enter into the King's palace."—Ps. xlv. 10-15 (R.V.).

VI.

SIN OVERCOMING AND OVERCOME 60

"Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away."—Ps. lxv. 3.

VII.

WHY THE TALENT WAS BURIED 72

"Then he which had received the one talent come and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping

PAGE

where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth."—MATT. xxv. 24, 25.

VIII.

GOD'S CERTAINTIES AND MAN'S CERTITUDES 82

"For how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea: wherefore also through Him is the amen."—2 COR. i. 20.

IX.

THE ANOINTING WHICH ESTABLISHES 93

"Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God."—2 COR. i. 21.

X.

THE SEAL AND EARNEST 104

"Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."—2 COR. i. 22.

XI.

THE WARRIOR PEACE 115

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ."—PHIL. iv. 7.

XII.

THE VISION OF GOD AND THE FEAST BEFORE HIM ... 125

"They saw God and did eat and drink."—EXODUS xxiv. 11.

XIII.

WHAT COMES OF A DEAD CHRIST 136

"And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God."—1 COR. xv. 14, 15.

XIV.

PAGE

FENCES AND SERPENTS 148

"Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him."—ECCLES. x. 8.

XV.

STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS 159

"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect n weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."—2 COR. xii. 8, 9.

XVI.

HOW TO KEEP IN THE LOVE OF GOD 170

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."—JUDE 20, 21.

XVII.

A DEATH IN THE DESERT... 181

"So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, . . . but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day."—DEUT. xxxiv. 5, 6.

XVIII.

FROM CENTRE TO CIRCUMFERENCE 192

"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."—GAL. ii. 20.

XIX.

PAGE

THE GUIDING PILLAR 203

"So it was alway: the cloud covered the tabernacle by day, and the appearance of fire by night."—NUMBERS ix. 16.

XX.

RIGHTEOUSNESS FIRST, THEN PEACE 214

"First being by interpretation King of Righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of Peace."—HEB. vii. 2.

XXI.

THE NEW NAME 223

"To him that overcometh will I give . . . a new name . . . which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."—REV. ii. 17.

XXII.

THE HEAVENLY VISION 236

"Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."—ACTS xxvi. 19.

XXIII.

THE THREEFOLD COMMON HERITAGE 247

"I, John, your brother, and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus."—REV. i. 9 (R.V.).

XXIV.

ANATHEMA AND GRACE 260

"The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus."—1 COR. xvi. 21-24.

XXV.

PAGE

THE SUPREME DESIRE OF THE DEVOUT SOUL 271

"Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God: Thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness."—PS. cxliii. 10.

XXVI.

THE DELAYS OF LOVE 282

"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard, therefore, that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was."—JOHN xi. 5, 6.

XXVII.

A PARABLE IN A MIRACLE 291

"And there came a leper to Him, beseeching Him, and kneeling down to Him, and saying unto Him, If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.

"And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His Hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

"And as soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed."—MARK i. 40-42.

XXVIII.

THE BURDEN-BEARING GOD 304

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits."—(A.V.)

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily *beareth our burdens*."—PS. lxviii. 19 (R.V.).

I.

The Unchanging Christ.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."—HEB. xiii. 8.

HOW far back does this "yesterday" go? The limit must be found by observing that it is "Jesus Christ" who is spoken of—that is to say, the *Incarnate* Saviour. That observation disposes of the reference of these words to the past eternity in which the eternal Word of God was what He is to-day. The sameness that is referred to here is neither the sameness of the Divine Son from all eternity, nor the sameness of the medium of revelation in both the old and the new dispensations, but the sameness of the *human* Christ to all generations of His followers. And the epoch referred to in the "yesterday" is defined more closely if we observe the previous context, which speaks of the dying teachers who have had the rule and have passed away. The "yesterday" is the period of these departed teachers; the "to-day" is the period of the writer and his readers.

But whilst the words of my text are thus narrowly limited, the attribute, which is predicated of Christ in them, is something more than belongs to manhood, and requires for its foundation the assumption of His deity. He is the unchanging Jesus because He is the Divine Son. The text resumes, at the end of the Epistle, the solemn words of the first chapter, which referred the declaration of the Psalmist to "the Son"—"Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." That Son, changeless and eternal by Divine immutability, is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Redeemer.

This text may well be taken as our motto in looking forward, as I suppose we are all of us more or less doing, and trying to forecast the dim outlines of the coming events of this New Year. Whatever may happen, let us hold fast by that confidence, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

I.—I apply these words, then, as a New Year's motto, in two or three different directions, and ask you to consider, first, the unchanging Christ in His relation to our changeful lives.

The one thing of which anticipation may be sure is that nothing continues in one stay. True, "that which is to be hath already been"; true, there is "nothing new under the sun"; but just as in the physical world the infinite variety of creatures and things are all made out of a few very simple elements, so, in our lives, out of a comparatively small number of possible incidents, an immense variety of combinations results, with the effect that,

while we may be sure of the broad outlines of our future, we are all in the dark as to its particular events, and only know that ceaseless change will characterise it, and so all forward looking must have a touch of fear in it, and there is only one thing that will enable us to front the else intolerable certainty of uncertainty, and that is, to fall back upon this thought of my text, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

The one lesson of our changeful lives ought to be for each of us the existence of that which changes not. By the very law of contrast, and by the need of finding sufficient reason for the changes, we are driven from the contemplation of the fleeting to the vision of the permanent. The waves of this stormy sea of life ought to fling us all high and dry on to the safe shore. Blessed are they who, in a world of passing phenomena, penetrate to the still centre of rest, and looking over all the vacillations of the things that can be shaken, can turn to the Christ and say, Thou Who movest all things art Thyself unmoved; Thou Who changest all things, Thyself changest not. As the moon rises slow and silvery, with its broad shield, out of the fluctuations of the ocean, so the one radiant Figure of the all-sufficient and immutable Lover and Friend of our souls should rise for us out of the billows of life's tossing ocean, and come to us across the seas. Brother! let the fleeting proclaim to you the permanent; let the world with its revolutions lead you up to the thought of Him that is the same for ever. For that is the only thought on which a man can build, and, building, be at rest.

The yesterday of my text may either be applied to the generations that have passed, and then the "to-day" is our little life; or it may be applied to my own yesterday, and then the to-day is this narrow present. In either application the words of my text are full of hope and of joy. In the former they say to us that no time can waste, nor any drawing from the fountain can diminish the all-sufficiency of that Divine Christ in whom eighteen centuries have trusted and been "lightened, and their faces were not ashamed." The yesterday of His grace to past generations is the prophecy of the future and the law for the present. There is nothing that ever any past epoch has drawn from Him, of courage and confidence, of hope and wisdom, of guidance and strength, of love and consolation, of righteousness and purity, of brave hope and patient endurance, which He does not stand by my side ready to give to me too to-day. "As we have heard so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts." And the old Christ of a thousand years is the Christ of to-day, ready to help, to succour, and to make us like Himself.

In the second reference, narrowing the "yesterdays" to our own experiences, the words are full of consolation and of hope. "Thou hast been my Help; leave me not, neither forsake me," is the prayer that ought to be taught us by every remembrance of what Jesus Christ has been to us. The high-water mark of His possible sweetness does not lie in some irrevocable past moment of our lives. We never have to say that we have

found a sufficiency in Him that we never shall find any more. Remember the time in your experience when Jesus Christ was most tender, most near, most sweet, most mysterious, most soul-sufficing for you, and be sure that He stands beside you ready to renew the ancient blessing and to surpass it in His gift. Man's love sometimes wearies, Christ's never; man's basket may be emptied, Christ's is fuller after the distribution than it was before. This fountain can never run dry. Not until seven times, but until seventy times seven; perfection multiplied into perfection, and that again multiplied by perfection once more, is the limit of the inexhaustible mercy of our Lord. And all in which the past has been rich lives in the present.

Remember, too, that this same thought which heartens us to front the inevitable changes also gives dignity, beauty, poetry, to the small, prosaic present. "Jesus Christ is the same *to-day*." We are always tempted to think that this moment is commonplace and insignificant. Yesterday lies consecrated in memory; to-morrow radiant in hope; but to-day is poverty-stricken and prose. The sky is furthest away from us right over our heads; behind and in front it seems to touch the earth. But if we will only realise that all that sparkling lustre and all that more than mortal tenderness of pity and of love with which Jesus Christ has irradiated and sweetened any past is verily here with us amidst the commonplaces and insignificant duties of the dusty to-day, then we need look back to no purple distance, nor forward

to any horizon where sky and earth kiss, but feel that here or nowhere, now or never, is Christ the all-sufficient and unchanging Friend. He is faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

II.—So, secondly, I apply these words in another direction. I ask you to think of the relation between the unchanging Christ and the dying helpers.

That is the connection in which the words occur in my text. The writer has been speaking of the subordinate and delegated leaders and rulers in the Church "who have spoken the word of God" and who have passed away, leaving a faith to be followed, and a conversation the end of which is to be considered. And, turning from all these mortal companions, helpers, guides, he bids us think of Him who liveth for ever, and for ever is the Teacher, the Companion, the Home of our hearts, and the Goal of our love. All other ties—sweet, tender, infinitely precious, have been or will be broken for you and me. Some of us have to look back upon their snapping; some of us have to look forward. But there is one bond over which the skeleton fingers of Death have no power, and they fumble at that knot in vain. He separates us from all others; blessed be God! he cannot separate us from Christ. "I shall not lose Thee though I die"; and Thou, Thou diest never.

God's changeful Providence comes into all our lives, and parts dear ones, making their places empty that Christ Himself may fill the empty places, and, striking away other props, though the tendrils that twine round them bleed with the

wrench, in order that the plant may no longer trail along the ground, but twine itself round the Cross and climb to the Christ upon the Throne. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne." The true King was manifested when the earthly, shadowy monarch was swept away. And just as, on the face of some great wooded cliff, when the leaves drop, the solemn strength of the everlasting rock gleams out pure, so, when our dear ones fall away, Jesus Christ is revealed, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." "They truly were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death; this Man continueth ever. He lives, and in Him all loves and companionships live unchanged."

III.—So, further, we apply, in the third place, this thought to the relation between the unchanging Christ and decaying institutions and opinions.

The era in which this Epistle was written was an era of revolution so great that we can scarcely imagine its apparent magnitude. It was close upon the final destruction of the ancient system of Judaism as an external institution. The Temple was tottering to its fall, the nation was ready to be scattered, and the writer, speaking to Hebrews, to whom that seemed to be the passing away of the eternal verities of God, bids them lift their eyes above all the chaos and dust of dissolving institutions and behold the true Eternal, the ever-living Christ. He warns them, in the verse that follows my text, not to be carried about with

divers and strange doctrines, but to keep fast to the unchanging Jesus. And so these words may well come to us with lessons of encouragement, and with teaching of duty and steadfastness, in an epoch of much unrest and change—social, theological, ecclesiastical—such as that in which our lot is cast. Man's systems are the shadows on the hillside. Christ is the everlasting solemn mountain itself. Much in the popular conception and representation of Christianity is in the act of passing. Let it go: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. We need not fear change within the limits of His Church or of His world. For change there means progress, and the more the human creations and embodiments of Christian truth crumble and disintegrate, the more distinctly does the solemn, single, unique figure of Christ the Same rise before us. There is nothing in the world's history to compare with the phenomena which is presented by the unworn freshness of Jesus Christ after all these centuries. All other men, however burning and shining their light, flicker and die out into extinction. And but for a season can the world rejoice in any of their beams. But this Jesus dominates the ages, and is as fresh to-day, in spite of all that men say, as He was eighteen centuries ago. They tell us He is losing His power; they tell us that mists of oblivion are wrapping Him round, as He moves slowly to the doom which besets Him in common with all the great names of the world. The wish is father to the thought. Christ is not done with yet, nor has the world done with Him, nor is He

less available for the necessities of this generation, with its perplexities and difficulties, than He was in the past. His sameness is consistent with an infinite unfolding of new preciousness and new powers, as new generations with new questions arise, and the world seeks for fresh guidance. "I write no new commandment unto you": I preach no new Christ unto you. "Again, a new commandment I write unto you," and every generation will find new impulse, new teaching, new shaping energies, social and individual, ecclesiastical, theological, intellectual, in the old Christ who was crucified for our offences and raised again for our justification, and remains "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

IV.—Lastly, look at these words in their application to the relation between the unchanging Christ and the eternal love of heaven.

The "for ever" of my text is not to be limited to this present life, but it runs on into the remotest future, and summons up before us the grand and boundless prospect of an eternal unfolding and reception of new beauties in the old earthly Christ. For Him the change between the "to-day" of his earthly life and the "for ever" of His ascended glory made no change in the tenderness of his heart, the sweetness of His smile, the nearness of His helping hand. The beloved Apostle, when he saw Him next after He was ascended, fell at His feet as dead, because the attributes of His nature had become so glorious. But when the old hand, the same hand that had been

pierced with the nails on the Cross, though it now held the seven stars, was laid upon him, and the old voice, the same voice that had spoken to him in the upper room and in feebleness from the Cross, though it was now as the "sound of many waters," said to him, "Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth and was dead and am alive for evermore"; John learned that the change from the Cross to the Throne touched but the circumference of his Master's being, and left the whole centre of His love and brotherhood wholly unaffected.

Nor will the change for us, from earth to the closer communion of the heavens, bring us into contact with a changed Christ. It will be but like the experience of a man starting from the outermost verge of the solar system, where that giant planet welters away out in the darkness and the cold, and travelling inwards ever nearer and nearer to the central light, the warmth becoming more fervent, the radiance becoming more wondrous, as he draws nearer and nearer to the greatness which he divined when he was far away, and which he knows better when he is close to it. It will be the same Christ, the Mediator, the Revealer, in heaven as on earth, whom we here dimly saw and knew to be the Sun of our souls through the clouds and mists of earth. That radiant and eternal sameness will consist with continual variety, and an endless streaming forth of new lustres and new powers. But through all the growing proximity and illumination of the heavens it will be the same Jesus that we knew

upon earth; still the Friend and the Lover of our souls.

So, dear friends, if you and I have Him for our very own, then we do not need to fear change, for change will be progress; nor loss, for loss will be gain; nor the storm of life, which will drive us to His breast; nor the solitude of death, for our Shepherd will be with us there. He will be "the same for ever"; though we shall know Him more deeply; even as we shall be the same, though "changed from glory into glory." If we have Him, we may be sure, on earth, of a "to-morrow" which "shall be as this day, and much more abundant." If we have Him, we may be sure of a Heaven in which the sunny hours of its unending day will be filled with the fruition of ever new glories from the old Christ who, for earth and Heaven, is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

II.

The Secret of Immortal Youth.

"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."—Isa. xl. 30, 31.

REMEMBER a sunset at sea, where the bosom of each wavelet that fronted the west was aglow with fiery gold, and the back of each turned eastward was cold green; so that, looking on the one hand all was glory, and on the other all was sober melancholy. So differently does life look to you young people and to us older ones. Every man must buy his own experience for himself, and no preaching nor talking will ever make you see life as we see it. It is neither possible nor desirable that you should; but it is both possible and most desirable that you should open your eyes to plain, grave facts, which do not at all depend on our way of looking at things, and that if they be ascertainable, as they are, you should let them shape your life.

Here are a couple of facts in my text which I

want you to look steadily in the face, and to take account of them, because, if you do so now, they may save you an immense deal of disappointment and sorrow in the days that are to come. You have the priceless prerogative still in your hands of determining what that future is to be; but you will never use that power rightly if you are guided by illusions, or if, unguided by anything but inclination, you let things drift, and do as you like.

So, then, my object is simply to deal with these two forecasts which my text presents; the one a dreary certainty of weariness and decay, the other a blessed possibility of inexhaustible and incorruptible strength and youth, and on the contrast to build as earnest an appeal to you as I can make.

I.—Now, then, first look at the first fact here, that of the dreary certainty of weariness and decay.

I do not need to spend much time in talking about that. It is one of the commonplaces which are so familiar that they have lost all power of impression, and can only be rescued from their trivial insignificance by being brought into immediate connection with our own experience. If, instead of the toothless generality, "the youths shall faint and be weary," I could get you young people to say, "*I*—*I* shall faint and be weary, and, as sure as I am living, I shall lose what makes to me the very joy of life at this moment," I should not have preached in vain.

Of course the words of my text point to the plain fact that all created and physical life, by the very law of its being, in the act of living tends to death; and by the very operation of its strength tends to

exhaustion. There are three stages in every creature's life—that of growth, that of equilibrium, that of decay. You are in the first. If you live you will come to the second and the third, as certain as fate. Your "eyes will grow dim," your "natural force" will be "abated," the body will become a burden, the years that are full of buoyancy will be changed for years of heaviness and weariness, strength will decay, "and the young men"—that is you—"shall utterly fall."

And the text points also to another fact, that, long before your natural life shall have begun to tend towards decay, hard work and occasional sorrows and responsibilities and burdens of all sorts will very often make you wearied and ready to faint. In your early days you dream of life as a kind of enchanted garden, full of all manner of delights: and you stand at the threshold with eager eyes and outstretched hands. Ah! dear young friend, long before you have traversed the length of one of its walks, you will often have been sick and tired of the whole thing, and weary of what is laid upon you.

My text points to another fact, as certain as gravitation, that the faintness and weariness and decay of the bodily strength will be accompanied with a parallel change in your feelings. We are drawn onward by hopes, and when we get them fulfilled we find that they are disappointing. Custom, which weighs upon us "heavy as frost, and deep almost as life," takes the edge off everything that is delightsome, though it does not so completely take away the pain of things that are burdensome and painful. Men travel from a

tinted morning into the sober light of common day, and with failing faculties and shattered illusions and dissipated hopes, and powers bending under the long monotony of middle life, most of them live. Now all that is the veriest threadbare morality, and I daresay while I have been talking some of you have been thinking that I am repeating platitudes that every old woman could preach. So I am. That is to say, I am trying to put into feeble words the universal human experience. That is *your* experience, and what I want to get you to think about now is that, as sure as you are living and rejoicing in your youth and strength, this is the fate that is awaiting you—"the youths shall faint and be weary, and shall utterly fall."

Well, then, one question, Do you not think that, if that is so, it would be as well to face it? Do you not think that a wise man would take account of all the elements in forecasting his life, and would shape his conduct accordingly? If there be something certain to come, it is a very questionable piece of wisdom to make that the thing which we are most unwilling to think about. I do not want to be a kill-joy; I do not want to take anything out of the happy buoyancy of youth. I would say, as even that cynical, bitter Ecclesiastes says, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth." By all means, only take all the facts into account, and if you have joys which shrivel up at the touch of this thought, then the sooner you get rid of such joys the better. If your gladness depends upon your forcibly shutting your eyes to what is inevitably

certain to come about, do you not think that you are living in a fool's paradise that you had better get out of as soon as possible? There is the fact. Will you be a wise and brave man and front it, and settle how you are going to deal with it, or will you let it hang there on your horizon, a thunder-cloud that you do not like to look at, and that you are all the more unwilling to entertain the thought of, because you are so sure that it will burst in storm? Lay this, then, to heart, though it be a dreary certainty, that weariness and decay are sure to be your fate.

II.—Now turn, in the next place, to the blessed opposite possibility of inexhaustible and immortal strength. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

The life of nature tends inevitably downward, but there may be another life within the life of nature which shall have the opposite motion, and tend as certainly upwards. "The youths shall faint and be weary." Whether they be Christians or not, the law of decay and fatigue will act upon them; but there may be that within each of us, if we will, which shall resist that law, and have no proclivity whatsoever to extinction in its blaze, to death in its life, to weariness in its effort, and shall be replenished and not exhausted by expenditure. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," and, in all forms of motion possible to a creature, they shall expatiate and never tire. So let us look on this blessed possibility a little more closely.

Note, then, how to get at it. "They that wait upon the Lord" is Old Testament dialect for what in New Testament phraseology is meant by "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." For the notion expressed here by "waiting" is that of expectant dependence, and the New Testament "faith" is the very same in its attitude of expectant dependence, while the object of the Old Testament "waiting," Jehovah, is identical with the object of the New Testament faith, which fastens on God manifest in the flesh, the Man Jesus Christ.

Therefore, I am not diverting the language of my text from its true meaning, but simply opening its depth, when I say that the condition of the inflow of this unwearied and immortal life into our poor, fainting, dying humanity is simply the trust in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of our souls. True, the revelation has advanced, the contents of that which we grasp are more developed and articulate, blessed be God! True, we know more about Jehovah, when we see Him in Jesus Christ, than Isaiah did. True, we have to trust in Him as dying on the Cross for our salvation and as the pattern and example in His humanity of all nobleness and beauty of life for young or old, but the Christ is the "same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." And the faith that knit the furthest back of the saints of old to the Jehovah, whom they dimly knew, is in essence identical with the faith that binds my poor, sinful heart to the Christ that died and that lives for my redemption and salvation. So, dear brethren, here is the simple old message

for each of you, young or old. No matter where we stand on the course of life, there may come into our hearts a Divine Indweller, who laughs at weariness and knows nothing of decay; and He will come if, as sinful men, we turn ourselves to that dear Lord, who fainted and was weary many a time in His humanity, and who now lives, the "strong Son of God, immortal love," to make us partakers in His immortality and His strength. How, then, we get this Divine gift is by faith in Jesus Christ, which is the expansion, as it was the root, of trust in Jehovah.

Further, what is this strength that we thus get, if we will, by faith? It is the true entrance into our souls of a Divine life. God in His Son will come to us, according to His own gracious and profound promise: "If any man open the door I will enter in." He will come into our hearts and abide there. He will give to us a life derived from, and, therefore, kindred with, His own. And in that connection it is very striking to notice how the prophet, in the context, reiterates these two words, "*fainteth* not, neither is *weary*." He begins by speaking of "God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth not, neither is weary." He passes on to speak of His gift of power to the faint. He returns to the contrast between the Creator's incorruptible strength and the fleeting power of the strongest and youngest. And then he crowns all with the thought that the same characteristics shall mark them in whom the unwearied God dwells as mark Him. We, too, like Him, if we have Christ in our

hearts by faith, shall share, in some fashion and degree in His wondrous prerogative of unwearied strength.

So, brethren, here is the promise. God will give Himself to you, and in the very heart of your decaying nature will plant the seed of an immortal being which shall, like His own, shake off fatigue from the limbs, and never tend to dissolution or an end. The life of nature dies by living; the life of grace, which may belong to us all, lives by living, and lives evermore thereby. And so that life is continuous and progressive, with no tendency to decay, nor term to its being. "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more" until it riseth to the zenith of the noontide of the day. Each of you, looking forward to the certain ebbing away of creatural power, to the certain changes that may pass upon you, may say, "I know that I shall have to leave behind me my present youthful strength, my unworn freshness, my buoyancy, my confidence, my wonder, my hope; but I shall carry my Christ; and in Him I shall possess the secret of an immortal youth."

The oldest angels are the youngest. The longer men live in fellowship with Christ the stronger do they grow. And though our lives, whether we be Christians or no, are necessarily subject to the common laws of mortality, we may carry all that is worth preserving of the earliest stages into the latest; and when grey hairs are upon us, and we are living next door to our graves, we may still have the enthusiasm, the energy, and above all, the

boundless hopefulness that made the gladness and the spring of our long-buried youth. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." "The youths shall faint and be weary, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

There is one more point to touch, and then I have done, and that is the manner in which this immortal strength is exercised. The latter clauses of my text give us, so to speak, three forms of motion. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles." Some good commentators find in this a parallel to the words in the 103rd Psalm, "My youth is renewed like the eagle's," and propose to translate it in this fashion, "They shall cast their plumage like the eagle." But it seems much more in accordance with the context and the language to adopt substantially the reading of our English version here, or to make the slight change, "They shall lift up their wings as the eagle," implying, of course, the steady, upward flight towards the light of heaven.

So, then, there are three forms of unwearied strength lying ready for you, young men and women, to take for your very own if you like, strength to soar, strength to run, strength to walk.

There is strength to soar. Old men generally shed their wings, and can only manage to crawl. They have done with romance. Enthusiasms are dead. Sometimes they cynically smile at their own past selves and their dreams. And it is a bad sign when an old man does that. But for the most part they are content, unless they have got Christ in their hearts, to keep along the low levels, and their

soaring days are done. But if you and I have Jesus Christ for the life of our spirits, as certainly as fire sends its shooting tongues upwards, so certainly shall we rise above the sorrows and sins and cares of this "dim spot which men call earth," and find an ampler field for buoyant motion high up in communion with God. Strength to soar means the gracious power of bringing all heaven into our grasp, and setting our affections on things above. As the night falls, and joys become fewer and life sterner, and hopes become rarer and more doubtful, it is something to feel that, however straitened may be the ground below, there is plenty of room above, and that, though we are strangers upon earth, we can lift our thoughts yonder. If there be darkness here, still we can "outsoar the shadow of our night," and live close to the sun in fellowship with God. Dear brethren, life on earth were too wretched unless it were possible to "mount up with wings as eagles."

Again, you may have strength to run—that is to say, there is power waiting for you for all the great crises of your lives which call for special, though it may be brief, exertion. Such crises will come to each of you, in sorrow, work, difficulty, hard conflicts. Moments will be sprung upon you without warning, in which you will feel that years hang on the issue of an instant. Great tasks will be clashed down before you unexpectedly which will demand the gathering together of all your power. And there is only one way to be ready for such times as these, and that is to live waiting on the Lord, near Christ, with Him in your hearts, and

then nothing will come that will be too big for you. However rough the road, and however severe the struggle, and however swift the pace, you will be able to keep it up. Though it may be with panting lungs and a throbbing heart, and dim eyes and quivering muscles, yet if you wait on the Lord you will run and not be weary. You will be masters of the crises.

Strength to walk may be yours—that is to say, patient power for persistent pursuit of weary, monotonous duty. That is the hardest, and so it comes last. Many a man finds it easy, under the pressure of strong excitement, and for a moment or two, to keep up a swift pace, who finds it very hard to keep steadily at unexciting work. And yet there is nothing to be done except by doggedly plodding along the dusty road of trivial duties, unhelped by excitement and unwearied by monotony. Only one thing will conquer the disgust at the wearisome round of mill-horse tasks which, sooner or later, seizes all godless men, and that is to bring the great principles of the Gospel into them, and to do them in the might and for the sake of the dear Lord. "They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk"—along life's common way in cheerful godliness—"and they shall not faint."

Dear friends, life to us all is, and must be, full of sorrow and of effort. Constant work and frequent sorrows wear us all out, and bring us many a time to the verge of fainting. I beseech you to begin right, and not to add to the other occasions for weariness that of having to retrace, with remorseful heart and ashamed feet, the paths of evil on which

you have run. Begin right—that is to say, begin with Christ and take Him for Inspiration, for Pattern, for Guide, for Companion. "Run with patience the race set before you, looking unto Jesus the Author of your Faith, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

And if you have Him in your hearts, then, however the creatural power may be weary, yet because He is with you "your shoes shall be iron and brass, and as your day so shall your strength be"; and you may lift up in your turn the glad triumphant acknowledgment: "For this cause we, feeble as we are, faint not, but though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day."

God bless you all, and make that your experience!

III.

Next the Throne.

"To sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father."—MATT. xx. 23.

THE request of James and John, through their mother, to which this is a portion of the answer, was singularly blended of good and evil, devotion and selfishness, insight and ignorance. It breathed the heartiest love of Christ, the most entire belief in His Kingdom and power, the conviction that to be nearest to Him was to be most blessed, a brave readiness to risk and bear anything for that, and a profound confidence that if He said "Yes" the accomplishment was certain.

So much for the good; but, on the other side, what vulgar, low notions of what His Kingdom was; what coarse, selfish ambition in this family conspiracy to steal a march on the others; and what utter ignorance of all the conditions for the place to which they aspire! Christ's answer, wonderfully patient and gentle, tries to lift them into a higher region, to make them understand

that they must be near Him in suffering before they could be near Him in glory, and that not even His will can give the honour they asked, as a mere piece of favouritism, and irrespective of moral and spiritual conditions.

I. The Seats by Christ's Side.—The disciples' request had no reference to the perfect form of Christ's Kingdom in another life, and our Lord's answer does not apply only to that. But the gulf between the present and future is largely imaginary, and these words of my text do apply to both sides of it, while yet they have a predominant reference to another life and to the conditions there. Observe that our Lord, in His patient and instructive answer to the foolish and selfish prayer of His two disciples, does not say to them, as it would have been so easy and natural to have said, if it had been true: "You are wrong altogether, there are no such places as those that you desire," but, on the contrary, says distinctly that there are, inasmuch as He tells them that to sit on His right hand and left *is* prepared for some of His Father.

Therefore, there is distinctly, in the words of my text, the principle of diversity of degree corresponding to what we call rank, and that diversity depends upon, and is, diversity in closeness to Jesus Christ. Just as here on earth all the differences between Christian men come down at last to this one difference—that some live nearer their Master and that some are further away from Him—so in the Heavens it shall be, and pre-eminence there shall consist in nearness in heart and spirit to the King. All shall be close to Him,

and all shall be every moment getting closer, but there shall be diversity in the proximity, and some shall sit on the right hand and on the left.

Of course we start with the conception of equality. All get the penny in the parable. All "sit down with Him on His throne," which is the apex of the universe. All have the same eternal life; all possess the same conditions and prerogatives of that heavenly and glorified body, of likeness to Jesus Christ, of cessation from the toil of earth, and all are, in the true sense of the word, from the beginning of the eternity of growing glory, perfect. But perfection does not exclude growth. There may be the most entire symmetrical development of faculties, and yet there may be the possibility of widening and of deepening. The cup which is filled, according to the old Puritan illustration, may be larger or smaller, but all the cups are full. But that good old illustration does not tell the whole story. The cup is not, like one of gold, of fixed circumference and depth, but, like the *calyx* of a flower, it is endowed with the power of growth, and continually increases in capaciousness and, therefore, in contents. Equality does not exclude variety, and perfection is not inconsistent with progress, and if there be progress there must necessarily be diversity of stages.

This variety is distinctly taught in Scripture. We have two parables occupied with this matter, both of which have to be taken into account. In that of the talents equal faithfulness in trading with unequal capital is made equal in recompense,

the same praise and the same entrance into the Lord's joy being given to the servant who had received two talents as to his richer companion who had five. But in the other parable, which completes the teaching of the former, and which only a very hasty and superficial criticism could regard as but a varying edition of it—namely, that of the pounds—precisely the converse idea is presented. There we have the same amount originally given to all, but unequally increased by greater or less diligence, and therefore a graduated scale of rewards corresponding thereto, in the gifts of authority over ten or five cities. A city for every pound! so much greater than, and yet so accurately proportioned to, the faithfulness of earth are the rewards of heaven! There is such a thing as "salvation, yet so as by fire"; the man entering into eternal life and yet the work that he did as a Christian teacher all being consumed and burnt up, and so he suffering loss; and, on the other hand, there is such a thing as salvation in fulness and "an entrance ministered abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Such diversity is a necessary result of the very conception of the future, as being the retribution for the present. For if retribution, then it must correspond to that of which it is the outcome and the reward. And that to which it corresponds, we only too sadly know, is a dreadful inequality in the maturity and purity of Christian life and conduct here. If only we would bring more closely together in our thoughts, as they are bolted in-

separably together in reality, our stature and progress in Christian character here, and the rewards and results that follow, we should understand that not only may, but must, there be wide adversities even in the one possession of the one eternal life; and that just as, and because, Christian men and women differ in the—I was going to say *quantity*, of Christ which they make their own here, so shall they differ in the lustre of the glory and the sweep of the dominion which is granted to them hereafter. "One at the right hand and one on the left"; and others further from the Throne, though all as near it as they can be, and all getting nearer it every moment.

Nor let us forget, in reference to this diversity, that we are taught in the context to discharge from our minds, in connection with it, all earthly ideas of superiority, wherein the excellency of the one is the inferiority of the others, and pre-eminence for A means degradation for all the rest of the alphabet. It is not so here, but the pre-eminence consists in, or at least is manifested by, a larger faculty for service and a deeper desire to serve. That is a wonderful thought for that dim unknown future, that even amongst perfect natures there shall be room for mutual help, and that none shall be so directly united with the all-sufficient source of all blessing that it shall be impossible for him to receive anything of his brother, or to give anything to another, but rather that all shall be knit together in common bonds of impartation, and that "no man shall say that anything" of the Christ "which he possesses is his own, but they

shall have all" of Him "common." And thus the princes in that world are the servants of those who stand further from the light and are less participant of its radiance and its warmth.

The rabbis had a couple of parables which illustrated this thought. There was a great king, said they, who entered into a city with his court. All passed through the one gate into the one palace, but each was marshalled according to his dignity when he entered there.

And again they said, in a singular variant of Christ's parable of the Marriage Supper: A great king made a feast, and invited many. Each man came bringing his seat; some, golden chairs; some, silken cushions; some, wooden benches; some, rough stones. Every man sat on what he brought. We determine where we shall sit. It is not all the same, in reference to that future life, how near your Master you live here. Plenty of us think that we should like to be very near Him in the heavens. "Ye know not what ye ask." The conditions are that you should be near Him here.

II.—So that brings me to speak, in the second place, of the law of precedence in the kingdom.

It belongs to them "for whom it is prepared of My Father." The language is strongly metaphorical. The conception is of the thrones all ranged and allocated in that upper chamber, as the stalls of the knights in some chapel of their order might be, while the owners were fighting in the field, and over each of the seats hung the banner and the cognizance of its occupant. So,

says Christ, the vacant thrones are there, "prepared of My Father"; and prepared with a definite reference to certain persons.

Now I do not take it that in this there is any doctrine of an absolute unconditional destination of those seats for individuals, apart from their character and faithfulness here, but simply a strong and picturesque statement of this truth, which is the answer to the foolish prayer of the two disciples, that the places are not given by favouritism, nor mere arbitrary will, but allocated in accordance with fixed principles and eternal laws in the Divine mind. So the question comes to be, What sort of people they are for whom these calm thrones in the empyrean are waiting. Can we ascertain the laws of precedence, the grounds on which the Divine preparation of the seats is based? The answer is plain in the context. It gives us two great principles.

The seats are prepared, first, for those that have drunk most deeply of Christ's cup. "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" They answered cheerfully and swiftly, "We can." And nobly they stood to their vow in after days, though when they made it they knew so little of what it implied. To drink of Christ's cup is no less the condition of *our* future nearness to Him. Not that the accident of actual martyrdom secures it. A martyr is not necessarily a saint. It is not being burnt to ashes for Christ that fits for the seats next Him; but it is the inward appropriation of His life and spirit, which will certainly lead to a true participa-

tion in His cup. One of these two was the first martyr among the Apostles, the other was not called to die for Christ, but to linger here after all his companions, and to teach a new generation the wonders that had been.

The measure, then, in which we Christian people incorporate Jesus Christ into ourselves here will determine all our future. If our whole being is saturated with Him, that will lead to a threefold partaking of His cup. It will lead to our standing in a relation to the world and its evils similar to His, and, in our humble measure, we too shall know what He knew of the world's antagonism, and of the sorrows of a pure soul walking amidst filth, and of love and self-sacrifice put forth in vain. It will lead to our sharing in the Master's cup, inasmuch also as it will re-produce in our spiritual experience the crucifying of the flesh and the death to self and sin which were Christ's, and we shall thus know "the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." There is no Christian life without that. It is a daily dying, a daily self-sacrifice, a daily putting to the death the old man, the natural passions, desires, tastes, inclinations. Unless we thus die ever we never live. Communion with Jesus Christ will lead to drinking of His cup in yet another fashion, inasmuch as it will make all our sufferings His, and bring into the darkest of our sorrows the sweet and blessed thought that in all our affliction He is afflicted, and so His presence will save us. If we drink His cup He drinks ours, and leaves the fragrance of His lips upon its edge. Thus fellow-

ship with His sufferings here, which rests upon communion of spirit with Himself, is the condition on which we shall draw nearest to Him in the fellowship of His glory.

The context gives a second condition of that pre-eminence. It falls to those who most fully imitate His life and death of service and sacrifice. There is but one road to the Throne. If we are going where He is, we must go as He went, for there are no by-ways. Unselfish service for His sake is the only path. "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." The service does not cease to be unselfish because it is brightened by the hope of being near Him. They who, in entirest self-oblivion, regard all spiritual enjoyments, natural faculties, and material possessions as trusted to them to scatter for His sake, and so to increase, are they who will stand nearest the Master whom they were so like on earth; and, having taken part, in some humble measure, in the likeness of His life and death, such shall be found also in the likeness of His resurrection.

These words about the preparation by the Father further suggest the certainty that these seats thus prepared shall be ours if we adhere to the conditions. Here vaulting ambition doth o'erleap itself. Men scramble for the best places, and before they reach them somebody else is seated there. But there is one field of ambition legitimate, one field of unselfish ambition, one field of ambition which is always sure of gratification and of finding the results more blessed than its most sanguine dreams—and that is, that we should seek to be

nearest our Master. If that be our aim, the aim shall not be missed. The inheritance incorruptible is reserved in heaven for those who by faith are kept for it. God is keeping my place for me, and will bring me to my place if I only abide near my Master, and live the unselfish life of service and sacrifice whereof He has set the pattern. So, at last, He will say to us, "Come, ye blessed, enter into the Kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world."

III.—Lastly, my text speaks of Jesus Christ as, under the aforesaid laws and restrictions, the Giver of the precedence.

To take the words before us as being an unconditional disclaimer, on His part, of His authority to give Heavenly places would be to run counter to the whole tenor of Scripture; and it would be to do violence to the whole force of the context. For His disclaimer must necessarily be interpreted with reference to the conceptions to which it is the answer. And these conceptions were that He could give the Kingdom, and pre-eminence in it, as a pure piece of partiality, and arbitrary favouritism, without regard to fitness. Since that was the request, the answer in my text must in all propriety be interpreted "It is not Mine to give *so*." As you will observe, "shall be given" is a supplement, and good commentators suggest that instead of reading "it shall be given to them," we should translate without a supplement "It is not Mine to give *except* to them to whom it is prepared of My Father." If we adopt such a rendering—and whether we adopt it or no the meaning is the

same—then we have here Christ not denying, but affirming, in accordance with all Scriptural analogy, that He is the Giver of place in the Kingdom. Only He asserts, as He always does, that His giving is not merely of His own will, but by the will of the Father; and that it is regulated by the principles which I have already laid down.

He is the Giver. "Have thou authority over the cities" was the language of the lord of the servants. "*I* will give to him that overcometh" is His own seven-fold utterance in the Apocalyptic epistles. He is the Judge, and, as Judge, exercises the authority to place men where He knows they ought to stand. He is not denuding Himself of His power to bestow, but He is telling us that, in the exercise of that power, He and the Father are one; and that He gives, not from foolish fondness, nor in answer to a bare and ignorant wish, but in accordance with these great principles. The gift is surely from His hand, for if the hand had not been pierced with the nails it never had been able to give the crown. And all that we hope for in the future, or possess in the present, is alike the purchase of His blood and the result of His great sacrifice.

The gift of Christ is heaven, and our place in the heaven. And how much sweeter that thought makes the heavenly glories they only who possess them can tell. That they shall be Christ's love-gift, that they shall come to the recipients charged not only with their own essential sweetness, but surcharged, over and above, with the fragrance of His love, gilds even the refined gold of the

heavenly crown, and makes even more precious "the unsearchable riches" of the treasures that are above.

Dear friends! one last word. Jesus Christ cannot give you heaven because you want it, nor as a mere piece of good nature and kindness. There are laws which He cannot break. Many of us seem to think that because God is merciful heaven is sure. It is a delusion. If Christ could save you He would. He wants to do it. He pleads with you that you will let Him. But, remember this, not even His love nor His power can give you the entrance there unless you comply with the condition. And the condition is that plain one, that you must be like Him, and so be fit for His presence. You can only become like Him by putting your trust, as a sinful man, in the great sacrifice of His Cross, and then taking that Cross as the pattern and law of your lives. You must begin with faith. "Add to your faith" all the graces which are the likeness of your Saviour-King, and so, and only so, "an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom."

IV.

The King in His Beauty.

"Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. (3) Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O mighty one, thy glory and thy majesty. (4) And in thy majesty ride on prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. (5) Thine arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under thee; they are in the heart of the king's enemies. (6) Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of equity is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. (7) Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."—Ps. xlv. 2-7 (R.V.).

HERE is no doubt that this Psalm was originally the marriage hymn of some Jewish king. All attempts to settle who that was have failed, for the very significant reason that neither the history nor the character of any of them correspond to the Psalm. Its language is a world too wide for the diminutive stature and stained virtues of the greatest and best of them. And it is almost ludicrous to attempt to fit its glowing sentences even to a Solomon. They all look like little David in Saul's armour. So, then,

we must admit one of two things. Either we have here a piece of poetical exaggeration far beyond the limits of poetic licence, or "a greater than Solomon is here." Every Jewish king, by virtue of his descent and of his office, was a living prophecy of the greatest of the sons of David, the future King of Israel. And the Psalmist sees the ideal Person who, as he knew, was one day to be real, shining through the shadowy form of the earthly king, whose very limitations and defects, no less than his excellencies and his glories, forced the devout Israelite to think of the coming King in whom "the sure mercies" promised to David should be facts at last. In plainer words, the Psalm celebrates Christ, not only although, but because, it had its origin and partial application in a forgotten festival at the marriage of some unknown king. It sees him in the light of the Messianic hope, and so it prophecies of Christ. My object is to take the features of this portrait of the King, partly in order that we may better understand the Psalm, and partly in order that we may with the more reverence crown Him as Lord of all.

I.—The Person of the King.

The old world ideal of a monarch put special emphasis upon two things—personal beauty and courtesy of address and speech. The Psalm ascribes both of these to the King of Israel, and from both of them draws the conclusion that one so richly endowed with the most eminent of royal graces is the object of the special favour of God. "Thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is

poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever."

Here, at the very outset, we have the key-note struck of superhuman excellence; and though the reference is, on the surface, only to physical perfection, yet beneath that there lies the deeper reference to a character which spoke through the eloquent frame, and in which all possible beauties and sovereign graces were united in fullest development, in most harmonious co-operation and unstained purity.

"Thou art fairer than the children of men." Put side by side with that, words which possibly refer to, and seem to contradict it. A later prophet, speaking of the same Person, said: "His visage was so marred, more than any man, and His form than the sons of men . . . There is no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him." We have to think, not of the outward form, howsoever lovely with the loveliness of meekness and transfigured with the refining patience of suffering it may have been, but of the beauty of a soul that was all radiant with a lustre of loveliness that shames the fragmentary and marred virtues of the rest of us, and stands before the world for ever as the supreme type and high-water mark of the glory that is possible to a human spirit. God has lodged in men's nature the apprehension of Himself, and all that flows from Him, as true, as good, as beautiful, and to these three there correspond wisdom, morality, and art. The latter, divorced from the other two, becomes earthly and devilish.

This generation needs the lesson that beauty wrenched from truth and goodness, and pursued for its own sake, by artist or by poet or by *dilettante*, leads by a straight descent to ugliness and to evil, and that the only true satisfying of the deep longing for "whatsoever things are lovely" is to be found when we turn to Christ and find in Him, not only wisdom that enlightens the understanding, and righteousness that fills the conscience, but beauty that satisfies the heart. He is "altogether lovely." Nor let us forget that once on earth the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment did shine as the light, as indicative of the possibilities that lay slumbering in His lowly Manhood, and as prophetic of that to which we believe that the ascended Christ hath now attained—viz., the body of His glory, wherein He reigns, filled with light and undecaying loveliness on the Throne of the Heaven. Thus He is fairer in external reality now, as He is, by the confession of an admiring, though not always believing, world, fairer in inward character than the children of men.

Another personal characteristic is "Grace is poured into thy lips." Kingly courtesy, and kingly graciousness of word, must be the characteristic of the sovereign of men. The abundance of that bestowment is expressed by that word "poured." We need only remember—"All wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth," or how even the rough instruments of authority were touched and diverted from their appointed purpose, and came back and said, "Never man spake like this Man." To the music

of Christ's words all other eloquence is harsh, poor, shallow—like the piping of a shepherd boy upon some wretched oaten straw as compared with the full thunder of the organ. Words came from His lips of unmingled graciousness. That fountain never sent forth sweet waters and bitter. He satisfies the canon of St. James: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." Words of wisdom, of love, of pity, of gentleness, of pardon, of bestowment, and only such, came from Him: "Daughter! Be of good cheer." "Son! Thy sins be forgiven thee." "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden."

"Grace is poured into thy lips"; and, withal, it is the grace of a king. For His language is authoritative even when it is most tender, and regal when it is most gentle. His lips, sweet as honey and the honeycomb, are the lips of an autocrat. He speaks and it is done: He commands and it stands fast. He says to the tempest, "Be still," and it it is quiet; and to the demons, "Come out of him," and they disappear; and to the dead, "Come forth," and he stumbles from the tomb.

Another personal characteristic is—"God hath blessed thee for ever." By which we are to understand, not that the two preceding graces are the reasons for the Divine benediction, but that the Divine benediction is the cause of them; and therefore they are the signs of it. It is not that because He is lovely and gracious therefore God hath blessed Him; but it is that we may know that God has blessed Him because He is lovely

and gracious. These endowments are the results, not the causes; the signs or the proofs, not the reasons of the Divine benediction. That is to say, the humanity so fair and unique shows by its beauty that it is the result of the continual and unique operation and benediction of a present God. We understand Him when we say, "On Him rests the Spirit of God without measure or interruption." The explanation of the perfect humanity is the abiding Divinity.

II.—We pass from the person of the King, in the next place, to His warfare.

The Psalmist breaks out in a burst of invocation, calling upon the King to array Himself in His weapons of warfare, and then in broken clauses vividly pictures the conflict. The Invocation runs thus: "Gird on thy sword upon thy thigh, O mighty hero, gird on thy glory and thy majesty, and ride on prosperously on behalf (or, in the cause) of truth and meekness and righteousness." The King, then, is the perfection of warrior strength as well as of beauty and gentleness—a combination of qualities that speaks of old days when kings *were* kings, and reminds us of many a figure in ancient song, as well as of a Saul and a David in Jewish history.

He calls upon Him to bind on His side His glittering sword, and to put on, as his armour, "glory and majesty." These two words, in the usage of the Psalms, belonging to Divinity, and they are applied to the monarch here as being the earthly representative of the Divine supremacy, on whom there falls some reflection of the glory

and the majesty of which He is the vice-regent and representative. Thus arrayed, with the weapon by His side and the glittering armour on His limbs, He is called upon to mount His chariot or His warhorse and ride forth.

But for what? "On behalf of truth, meekness, righteousness." If He be a warrior, these are the purposes for which the true King of men must draw His sword, and these only. No vulgar ambition nor cruel lust of conquest, earth-hunger, or "glory" actuates Him. Nothing but the spread through the world of the gracious beauties which are His own can be the end of the King's warfare. He fights for truth; He fights—strange paradox—for meekness; He fights for righteousness. And He not only fights *for* them, but *with* them, for they are His own, and by *reason* of them He "rides prosperously," as well as "rides prosperously" in order to establish them.

In two or three swift touches the Psalmist next paints the tumult and hurry of the fight. "Thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things." There are no armies or allies, none to stand beside Him. The one mighty figure of the kingly warrior stands forth, as in the Assyrian sculptures of conquerors, erect and alone in his chariot, crashing through the ranks of the enemy, and owing victory to his own strong arm alone.

Then follow three short, abrupt clauses, which in their hurry and fragmentary character, reflect the confusion and swiftness of battle.

"Thine arrows are sharp. . . . The people fall under thee," . . . "in the heart of the

king's enemies." He sees the bright arrow on the string. It whizzes; he looks—the plain is strewed with prostrate forms, the king's arrow in the heart of each.

Put side by side with that this picture:—A rocky road; a great city shining in the morning sunlight across a narrow valley; a crowd of shouting peasants waving palm branches in their rustic hands; in the centre the meek carpenter's Son, sitting upon the poor robes which alone draped the ass's colt, the tears upon His cheeks, and His lamenting heard above the Hosannahs, as He looked across the glen and said, "If thou hadst known the things that belong to thy peace!" That is the fulfilment, or part of the fulfilment of this prophecy. The slow-pacing, peaceful beast and the meek, weeping Christ are the reality of the vision which, in such strangely-contrasted and yet true form, floated before the prophetic eye of this ancient singer. For Christ's humiliation is His majesty, and His sharpest weapon is His all-penetrating love, and His Cross is His chariot of victory and throne of dominion.

But not only in His earthly life of meek suffering does Christ fight as a King, but all through the ages the world-wide conflict for truth and meekness and righteousness is His conflict; and wherever that is being waged the power which wages it is His, and the help which is done upon earth He doeth it all Himself. True, He has His army, willing in the day of His power, and clad in priestly purity and armour of light, but all their strength, courage, and victory are from

Him; and when they fight and conquer, it is not they, but He in them, who struggles and overcomes. We have a better hope than that built on "a stream of tendency that makes for righteousness." We know a Christ crucified and crowned, who fights for it, and what He fights for will hold the field.

This prophecy of our psalm is not exhausted yet. I have set side by side with it one picture—the Christ on the ass's colt. Put side by side with it this other. "I beheld the heaven opened; and lo! a white horse. And He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war." The psalm waits for its completion still, and shall be filled on that day of the true marriage supper of the Lamb, when the festivities of the marriage chamber shall be preceded by the last battle and crowning victory of the King of kings, the Conqueror of the world.

III.—Lastly, we have the Royalty of the King. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." This is not the place nor time to enter on the discussion of the difficulties of these words. I must run the risk of appearing to state confident opinions without assigning reasons when I venture to say that the translation in the Authorised Version is the natural one. I do not say that others have been adopted by reason of doctrinal prepossessions; I know nothing about that; but I do say that they are not by any means so natural a translation as that which stands before us. What it may mean is another matter; but the plain rendering of the words I venture to assert, is what our English Bible makes it—"Thy throne, O Lord! is for ever and ever."

Then it is to be remembered that throughout the Old Testament we have occasional instances of the use of that great and solemn designation in reference to persons in such place and authority as that they are representatives of God. So kings and judges and lawyers and the like are spoken of more than once. Therefore there is not, in the language, translated as in our English Bible, necessarily the implication of the unique divinity of the persons so addressed. But I take it that here is an instance in which the prophet was "wiser than he knew," and in which you and I understand him better than he understood himself, and know what God, who spoke through him, meant, whatsoever the prophet, through whom He spoke, did mean. That is to say, I take the words before us as directly referring to Jesus Christ, and as directly declaring the Divinity of His person, and therefore the eternity of His kingdom.

We live in days when that perpetual sovereignty is being questioned. In a revolutionary time like this it is well for Christian people, seeing so many venerable things going, to tighten their grasp upon the conviction that, whatever goes, Christ's Kingdom will not go; and that, whatever may be shaken by any storms, the foundation of His Throne stands fast. For our personal lives, and, for the great hopes of the future beyond the grave, it is all-important that we should grasp, as an elementary conviction of our faith, the belief in the perpetual rule of that Saviour whose rule is life and peace.

In the great mosque of Damascus, which was a Christian church once, there may still be read,

deeply cut in the stone, high above the pavement where the Mohammedans bow, these words, "Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom." It is true, and yet it shall be known that He is for ever and ever the Monarch of the world.

Then, again, this royalty is a royalty of righteousness. "The sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness." His rule is no arbitrary sway, His rod is no rod of iron and tyrannical oppression, His own personal character is righteousness. Righteousness is the very life-blood and animating principle of His rule. He loves righteousness, and therefore puts His broad shield of protection over all who love it and seek after it. He hates wickedness, and therefore He wars against it wherever it is, and seeks to draw men out of it. And thus His kingdom is the hope of the world.

And, lastly, this dominion of perennial righteousness is the dominion of unparalleled gladness. "Therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of joy above thy fellows." Set side by side with that the other words, "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." And remember how, at the very darkest moment of the Lord's earthly experiences, He said: "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." Christ's gladness flowed from Christ's righteousness. Because His pure humanity was ever in touch with God, and in conscious obedience to Him, therefore, though darkness was around, there was light within. He was "sorrowful, yet

always rejoicing," and the saddest of men was likewise the gladdest of men, and possessed "the oil of joy above His fellows."

Brother! that kingdom is offered to us; participation in that joy of our Lord may belong to each of us. He rules that He may make us like Himself, lovers of righteousness, and so, like Himself, possessors of unfading joy. Make Him your King; let His arrow reach your heart; bow in submission to His power; take for your very life His words of graciousness; lovingly gaze upon His beauty till some reflection of it shall shine from you; fight by His side with strength drawn from Him alone; own and adore Him as the enthroned God-man, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Crown Him with the many crowns of supreme trust, heart-whole love, and glad obedience. So shall you be honoured to share in His warfare and triumph. So shall you have a throne close to His, and eternal as it. So shall His right sceptre be graciously stretched out to you to give you access with boldness to the presence chamber of the King. So shall He give you, too, "the oil of joy for mourning" even in the valley of weeping, and the fulness of His gladness for evermore, when He sets you at His right hand.

V.

The Portrait of the Bride.

"(10) Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; (11) So shall the King desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him. (12) And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour. (13) The King's daughter within the palace is all glorious: her clothing is inwrought with gold. (14) She shall be led unto the King in broidered work; the virgins, her companions, that follow her shall be brought unto thee. (15) With gladness and rejoicing shall they be led; they shall enter into the King's palace." —Ps. xlv. 10-15 (R.V.).

THE relation between God and Israel is constantly represented in the Old Testament under the emblem of a marriage. The tenderest promises of protection and the sharpest rebukes of unfaithfulness are based upon this foundation. "Thy Maker is thy Husband"; or, "I am married unto thee, saith the Lord." The emblem is transferred in the New Testament to Christ and His Church. Beginning with John the Baptist's designation of Him as the Bridegroom, it reappears in many of our Lord's sayings and parables, is frequent in the writings of the Apostle

Paul, and reaches its height of poetic splendour and terror in that magnificent description in Revelations of the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Seeing, then, the continual occurrence of this metaphor, it is unnatural and almost impossible to deny its presence in this Psalm. In a former sermon I have directed attention to the earlier portion of it, which presents us, in its portraiture of the King, a shadowy and prophetic outline of Jesus Christ. I desire, in a similar fashion, to deal now with the latter portion, which, in its portrait of the bride, presents us with truths having their real fulfilment in the Church collectively and in the individual soul.

Of course, inasmuch as the consort of a Jewish monarch was not an incarnate prophecy, as her husband was, the transference of the historical features of this wedding-song to a spiritual purpose is not so satisfactory, or easy, in the latter part as in the former. There is a thicker rind of prose fact, as it were, to cut through, and certain of the features cannot be applied to the relation between Christ and His Church without undue violence. But, whilst we admit that, it is also clear that the main, broad outlines of this picture do require as well as admit its higher application. Therefore I turn to them to try to bring out what they teach us so eloquently and vividly of Christ's gifts to, and requirements from, the souls that are wedded to Him.

I.—Now the first point is this—the all-surrendering Love that must mark the Bride.

The language of the tenth verse is the voice of prophecy or inspiration; speaking words of fatherly counsel to the princess—"Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house." Historically I suppose it points to the foreign birth of the queen, who is called upon to abandon all old ties, and to give herself with wholehearted consecration to her new duties and relations.

In all real wedded life, as those who have tasted it know, there comes, by sweet necessity, the subordination, in the presence of a purer and more absorbing affection, of all lower, howsoever sweet, loves that once filled the whole heart. Such surrender is no pain but gladness, inasmuch as the deeper well that has been sunk dries the surface springs, and gathers all their waters into itself. The new treasure that has filled the heart compels, by glad compulsion, the surrender, or, at least, the subordination of all former affections to the sweet constraint of all-mastering love.

The same thing is true in regard to the union of the soul with Christ. The description of the bride's abandonment of former duties and ties may be transferred, without the change of a word, to our relations to Him. If love to Him has really come into our hearts, it will master all our yearnings and tendencies and affections, and we shall feel that we cannot but yield up everything besides, by reason of the sovereign power of this new affection. Christ demands from us (if I may use the word "demand" for the beseeching of love), for His sake, and for our sakes, the entire surrender of ourselves to Him. And that new

affection will deal with the old loves, just as the new buds upon the beech-trees in the spring deal with the old leaves that still hang withered on some of the branches. It will push them from their hold, and they will drop. If a river should be turned into some dark cave where unclean beasts have herded and littered for years, the bright waters will sweep out on their bosom all the filth and rottenness. So, when the love of Christ comes surging and flashing into a heart, it will bear out on its broad surface all conflicting and subordinate inclinations, with the passions and lusts that used to rule and befoul the spirit. Christ demands complete surrender, and, if we are Christians, that absolute abandonment will not be a pain nor unwelcome. We shall drop the toys of earth as easily and naturally as a child will some trinket or plaything when it stretches out its little hand to get a better gift from its loving mother. Love will sweep the heart clean of its antagonists; and there is no real union between Jesus Christ and us except in the measure in which we joyfully, and not as a reluctant giving up of things that we would much rather keep if we durst, "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord."

Have the terms of wedded life changed since my psalm was written? Is there less need now than there used to be that, if we are to possess a heart, we should give a whole heart? And have the terms of Christian living altered since the old days, when He said, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be

My disciple?" Ah! I fear me that it is no uncharitable judgment to say that the bulk of so-called Christians are playing at being Christians, and have never penetrated into the depths either of the sweet all-sufficiency of the love that they say they possess, or the constraining necessity that is in it for the surrender of all besides. Many happy husbands and wives, if they would only treat Jesus Christ as they treat one another, would find out a power and a blessedness in the Christian life that they know nothing about at present. "Daughter, forget thine own people and thy father's house!"

II.—Again, the second point here is that which directly follows—the King's love and the Bride's reverence. "So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him."

The King is drawn, in the outgoings of His affection, by the sweet trust and perfect love which has surrendered everything for Him and happily followed Him from the far-off land. And then, in accordance with Oriental ideas, and with His royal rank, the bride is exhorted, in the midst of the utter trust and equality born of love, to remember, "He is thy Lord, and reverence thou Him." So, then, here are two thoughts that go, as I take it, very deep into the realities of the Christian life. The first is that, in simple literal fact, Jesus Christ is affected, in his relation to us, by the completeness of our dependence upon Him, and surrender of all else for Him. We do not believe that half vividly enough. We have sur-

rounded Jesus Christ with a halo of mystery and of remoteness which neither lets us think of Him as being really man or really God. And I press on you this as a plain fact, no piece of pulpit rhetoric, that His relation to us as Christians hinges upon our surrender to Him. Of course, there is a love with which He pours Himself out over the unworthy and the sinful—blessed be His name!—and the more sinful and the more unworthy, the deeper the tenderness and the more yearning the pity and pathos of invitation which He lavishes upon us. But that is a different thing from this other, which is that He is pleased or displeased, actually drawn to or repelled from us, in the measure of the completeness and gladness of our surrender of ourselves to Him. That is what Paul means when he says that he labours that whether present or absent he may be *pleasing* to Christ. And this is the highest and strongest motive that I know for all holy and noble living, that we shall bring a smile into our Master's face and draw Him nearer to ourselves thereby. "*So* shall the King greatly desire thy beauty."

Again, in the measure in which we live out our Christianity, in whole-hearted and thorough surrender, in that measure shall we be *conscious* of His nearness and feel His love.

There are many Christian people that have only got religion enough to make them uncomfortable, only enough to make religion to them a system of regulations, negative and positive, the reasonableness and sweetness of which they only partially

apprehend. They must not do *this* because it is forbidden; they ought to do *that* because it is commanded. They would much rather do the forbidden thing, and they have no wish to do the commanded thing. And so they live in twilight. And when they come beside a man that really has been walking in the light of Christ's face, his language and experience, though it be but a transcript of facts, sounds to them all unreal and fanatical. They miss the blessing that is waiting for them, just because they have not really given up themselves. If by resolute and continual opening of our hearts to Christ's real love and presence, and by consequent casting away of our false and foolish self-dependence, we were to blow away the clouds that come between us and Him, we should feel the sunshine. But as it is, a miserable multitude of professing Christians walk in the darkness, and have no light, or, at the most, but some wintry sunshine that struggles through the thick mist, and does little more than reveal the barrenness that lies around. Brethren! If you want to be happy Christians, be out-and-out ones; and if you would have your hands and your hearts filled with Christ, empty them of the trash that they grip so closely now.

Then, on the other side, there is the reminder and exhortation? "He is thy Lord, worship thou Him." The beggar-maid that, in the old ballad, married the king in all her love, was filled with reverence; and the ragged, filthy souls, whom Jesus Christ stoops to love, and wash, and make His own, are never to forget, in the highest rapture of

their joy, their lowly adoration, nor, in the glad familiarity of their loving approach to Him, cease to remember that the test of love is "Keep My commandments."

There are types of emotional and sentimental religion that have a great deal more to say about love than about obedience; that are full of half wholesome apostrophes to a "dear Lord," and half forget the "*Lord*" in the emphasis which they put on the "*dear*." And I want you to remember this as by no means an unnecessary caution, and of special value in some quarters to-day, that the test of the reality of Christian love is its lowliness, and that all that which indulges in heated emotion, and forgets practical service, is rotten and spurious. If the king desire her beauty, still, when he stretches out the golden sceptre, Esther must come to him with lowly guise and a reverent heart. "He is thy Lord, worship thou Him."

III.—The next point in this portraiture is the reflected honour and influence of the bride. There are difficulties about the translation of the 12th verse of our Psalm that I do not need to trouble you with. We may take it for our purpose as it stands before us. "The daughter of Tyre" (representing the wealthy, outside nations) "shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour."

The bride, thus beloved by the King, thus standing by His side, those around recognise her dignity and honour, and draw near to secure her intercession. Translate that out of the emblem into plain words, and it comes to this—if Chris-

tian people, and communities of such, are to have influence in the world, they must be thorough-going Christians. If they are, they will get hatred sometimes; but men know honest people and religious people when they see them, and such Christians will win respect and be a power in the world. If Christian men and Christian communities are despised by outsiders, they very generally earn the contempt and deserve it, both from men and from heaven. The true Evangelist is Christian character. They that manifestly live with the sunshine of the Lord's love on their faces, and whose hands are plainly clear from worldly and selfish graspings, will have the world recognising the fact and honouring them accordingly. "The sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee, and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet." When the Church has cast the world out of its heart it will conquer the world—and not till then.

IV.—The next point in this picture is the fair adornment of the bride. The language is in part ambiguous; and if this were the place for commenting would require a good deal of comment. But we take it as it stands in our Bible, "The King's daughter is all glorious within"—not within her nature but within the innermost recesses of the palace—"her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework."

It is an easy and well-worn metaphor to talk about people's character as their dress. We speak

about the "habits" of a man, and we use that word to express both his customary manners and his costume. Custom and costume, again, are the same word. So here, without any departure from the well-trodden path of Scriptural emblem, we cannot but see in the glorious apparel the figure of the pure character with which the bride is clothed. The book of the Revelation dresses her in the fine linen clean and white, which symbolizes the lustrous radiance and snowy purity of righteousness. The psalm describes her dress as partly consisting in garments gleaming with gold, which suggests splendour and glory, and partly in robes of careful and many-coloured embroidery, which suggests the patience with which the slow needle has been worked through the stuff, and the variegated and manifold graces and beauties with which she is adorned.

So, putting all the metaphors together, the true Christian character, which will be ours if we really are the subjects of that Divine love, will be lustrous and snowy as the snows on Hermon, or as was the garment whose whiteness outshone the neighbouring snows when He was transfigured before them. Our characters will be splendid with a splendour far above the tawdry beauties and vulgar conspicuousness of the "heroic" and wordly ideals, and will be endowed with a purity and harmony of colouring in richly various graces, such as no earthly looms can ever weave.

We are not told here how the garment is attained. It is no part of the purpose of the psalm to tell us that, but it is part of its purpose

to insist that there is no marriage between Christ and the soul except that soul be pure, none except it be robed in the beauty of righteousness and the splendour of consecration, and the various gifts of an all-giving Spirit. The man that came into the wedding-feast with his dirty, every-day clothes on was turned out as a rude insulter. But what of the queen that should come foully dressed? There would be no place for her amidst its solemnities. You will never stand at the right hand of Christ unless your souls here are clothed in the fine linen clean and white, and over it the flashing wealth and the harmonised splendour of the gold and embroidery of Christlike graces. We know how to get the garment. Faith strips the rags and puts the best robe on us; and effort based upon faith enables us day by day to put off the old man with his deeds and to put on the new man. The bride "made *herself* ready," and "to her was *granted* that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white."

V.—Lastly, we have the picture of the home-coming of the bride. "She shall be brought unto the King . . . . with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the King's palace."

The presence of virgin companions waiting on the bride is no more difficult to understand here than it is in Christ's parable of the Ten Virgins. It is a characteristic of all parabolical representation to be elastic, and sometimes duplicate its emblems for the same thing; and that is the case here. But the main point to be insisted upon is

this, that, according to the perspective of Scripture, the life of the Christian Church here on earth is, if I may so say, a betrothal in righteousness and lovingkindness; and that the betrothal waits for its consummation in that great future when the bride shall pass into the presence of the King. The whole collective body of sinful souls redeemed by His blood, and who know the sweetness of His partially received love, shall be drawn within the curtains of that upper house, and enter into a union with Christ Jesus ineffable, incomprehensible till experienced; and of which the closest union of loving souls on earth is but a dim shadow. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit"; and the reality of our union with Him rises above the emblem of a marriage, as high as spirit rises above flesh.

The psalm stops at the palace-gate. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." But there is a solemn prelude to that completed union and its deep rapture. Before it there comes the last campaign of the conquering King on the white horse, who wars in righteousness. Dear friends! You must choose now whether you will be of the company of the Bride or of the company of the enemy. "They that were ready went in with Him unto the marriage, and the door was shut."

Which side of the door do *you* mean to be on?

VI.

Sin Overcoming and Overcome.

"Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away."—Ps. lxv. 3.

THERE is an intended contrast in these two clauses more pointed and emphatic in the original than in our Bible, between man's impotence and God's power in the face of the fact of sin. The words of the first clause might be translated, with perhaps a little increase of vividness, "iniquities are too strong for me"; and the "Thou" of the next clause is emphatically expressed in the original, "as for our transgressions" (which we cannot touch), "*Thou* shalt purge them away." Despair of self is the mother of confidence in God; and no man has learned the blessedness and the sweetness of God's power to cleanse who has not learnt the impotence of his own feeble attempts to overcome his transgression. The very heart of Christianity is redemption. There are a great many ways of looking at Christ's mission and Christ's work, but I venture to say

that they are all inadequate unless they start with this as the fundamental thought, and that only he who has learnt by serious reflection and bitter personal conviction the gravity and the hopelessness of the fact of the bondage of sin, rightly understands the meaning and the brightness of the Gospel of Christ. The angel voice that told us His name, and based His name upon His characteristic work, went deeper into the "philosophy" of Christianity than many a modern thinker when he said, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, because He shall save His people from their sins." So here we have the hopelessness and misery of man's vain struggles, and side by side the joyful confidence in the Divine victory. We have the problem and the solution, the barrier and the overleaping of it; man's impotence and the omnipotence of God's mercy. My iniquities are too strong for me, but Thou art too strong for them. As for our transgressions, of which I cannot purge the stain, with all my tears and with all my work, "Thou shalt purge them away." Note, then, these two—first, the cry of despair; second, the ringing note of confidence.

I.—The cry of despair.

"Too strong for me," and yet they *are* me. Me, and *not* me; mine, and yet, somehow or other, my enemies, although my children—too strong for me, yet I give them their strength by my own cowardly and feeble compliance with their temptations; too strong for me and overmastering me, though I pride myself often on my freedom and spirit when I am yielding to them. Mine iniquities are mine, and

yet they are not mine; me, and yet, blessed be God! they can be separated from me.

The picture suggested by the words is that of some usurping power that has mastered a man, laid its grip upon him so that all efforts to get away from the grasp are hopeless. Now, I dare say, some of you are half consciously thinking that this is a piece of ordinary pulpit exaggeration, and has no kind of application to the respectable and decent lives that most of you live, and are ready to say, with as much promptitude and as much falsehood as the old Jews did, even whilst the Roman eagles, lifted above the walls of the castle, were giving them the lie, "We were never in bondage to any man." You do not know or feel that anything has got hold of you which is stronger than you. Well, let us see.

Consider for a moment. You are powerless to master your evil, considered as habits. You do not know the tyranny of the usurper until a rebellion is got up against him. As long as you are gliding with the stream you have no notion of its force. Turn your boat and try to pull against it, and when the sweat-drops come on your brow, and you are sliding backwards, in spite of all your effort, you will begin to find out what a tremendous down-sucking energy there is in that quiet, silent flow. So the ready compliance of the worst part of my nature masks for me the tremendous force with which my evil tyrannizes over me, and it is only when I face round and try to go the other way, that I find out what a power there is in its invisible grasp.

Did you ever try to cure some trivial bad habit, some trick of your fingers, for instance? You know what infinite pains and patience and time it took you to do that, and do you think that you would find it easier if you once set yourself to cure that lust, say, or that petulance, pride, passion, dishonesty, or whatsoever form of selfish living in forgetfulness of God may be your besetting sin? If you will try to pull the poison fang up, you will find how deep its roots are. It is like the yellow charlock in a field, which seems only to spread in consequence of attempts to get rid of it; as the rough rhyme says—"One year's seeding, seven years' weeding"—and more at the end of the time than at the beginning. Any honest attempt at mending character drives a man to this—"Iniquities are too strong for me."

I do not for a moment deny that there may be, and occasionally is, a magnificent force of will and persistency of purpose in efforts at self-improvement on the part of perfectly irreligious men. But, if by the occasional success of such effort a man conquers one form of evil, that does not deliver him from evil. You have got the usurping dominion deep in your nature, and what does it matter in essence which part of your being is most conspicuously under its control? It may be some animal passion, and you may conquer that. A man, for instance, when he is young, lives in the sphere of sensuous excitement; and when he gets old he turns a miser, and laughs at the pleasures that he used to get from the flesh, and thinks himself ever so much wiser. Is he any better? He

has changed, so to speak, the kind of sin. That is all. The devil has put a new viceroy in authority, but it is the old government, though with fresh officials. The house which is cleared of the seven devils without getting into it the all-filling and sanctifying grace of God and love of Jesus Christ will stand empty. Nature abhors a vacuum, and so does Satan, and the empty house invites the seven ill-tenants, and back they come in all their diabolical completeness.

So, dear friends, though you may do a great deal—thank God!—in subduing evil habits and inclinations, you cannot touch, so as to master, the central fact of sin unless you get God to help you to do it. And you have to go down on your knees before you can do that work. "Iniquities are too strong for me."

Then, again, consider our utter impotence in dealing with our own evil regarded as guilt. When we do wrong, the judge within, which we call conscience, says to us two things, or perhaps three. It says first, "That is wrong"; it says secondly, "You have got to answer for it"; and I think it says thirdly, "And you will be punished for it." That is to say, there is a sense of demerit that goes side by side with our evil, as certainly as the shadow travels with the substance. And though, sometimes, when the sun goes behind a cloud, there is no shadow, and sometimes, when the light within us is darkened, conscience does not cast the black shade of demerit across the mind; yet conscience is there, though silent. When it does speak it says, "You have done

wrong, and you are answerable." Answerable to whom? To it? No! To society? No! To law? No! You can only be answerable to a person, and that is God. Against Him we have sinned. We do wrong; and if wrong was all that we had to charge ourselves with, it would be because there was nothing but law that we were answerable to. We do unkind things; and if unkindness and inhumanity were all that we had to charge ourselves with, it would be because we were only answerable to one another. We do suicidal things; and if self-inflicted injury was all our definition of evil, it would be because we were only answerable to our conscience and ourselves. But we *sin*, and that means that every wrong thing, big or little, which we do, whether we think about God in the doing of it or no, is, in its deepest essence, an offence against Him.

The judgment of conscience carries with it the solemn looking-for of future judgment. It says, "I am only a herald: *He* is coming." No man feels the burden of guilt without an anticipation of judgment. What are you going to do with these two feelings? Do you think that you can deal with them? It is no use saying, "I am not responsible for what I did; I inherited such-and-such tendencies; circumstances are so-and-so. I could not help it; environment, and evolution, and all the rest of it diminish, if they do not destroy, responsibility." Be it so! And yet, after all, this is left: the certainty in my own convictions that I had the power to do or not to do. That is a fundamental part of a man's con-

sciousness. If it is a delusion, what is to be trusted? and how can we be sure of anything? So that we are responsible for our action, and can no more elude the guilt that follows sin than we can jump off our own shadow. And I want you to consider what you are going to do about your guilt.

One thing you cannot do—you cannot remove it. Men have tried to do so by sacrifices, and false religions. They have swung in the air by means of hooks fastened into their bodies, and I do not know what besides, and they have not managed it. You can no more get rid of your guilt by being sorry for your sin than you could bring a dead man to life again by being sorry for a murder. What is done is done. "What I have written I have written." Nothing will ever wash that little lily hand white again, as the magnificent murderess in Shakespeare's great creation found out. You can forget your guilt; you can ignore it. You can adopt some of the easily-learned-by-rote and fashionable theories that will enable you to minimise it, and to laugh at us old-fashioned believers in guilt and punishment. You do not take away the rock because you blow out the lamps of the light-house. And you do not alter an ugly fact by ignoring it. I beseech you, as reasonable men and women, to open your eyes to these plain facts about yourselves, that you have an element of demerit and of liability to consequent evil and suffering which you are perfectly powerless to touch or to lighten in the slightest degree.

Consider, again, our utter impotence in regard to our evil, looked upon as a barrier between us and God. That is the force of the context here. The Psalmist has just been saying, "O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come." And then he bethinks himself how flesh compassed with infirmities can come. And he staggers back bewildered. There can be no question but that the plain dictate of common sense is, "We know that God heareth not sinners." My evil not only lies like a great black weight of guilt and of habit on my consciousness and on my activity, but it actually stands like a frowning cliff, barring my path and making a barrier between me and God. "Your hands are full of blood; I hate your vain oblations," says the solemn Voice through the prophet. And this stands for ever true—"The prayer of the wicked is an abomination" There frowns the barrier. Thank God! mercies come through it, howsoever close knit and impenetrable it may seem. Thank God! no sin can shut Him out from us, but it can shut us out from Him. And though we cannot separate God from ourselves, and He is nearer us than our consciousness and the very basis of our being, yet by a mysterious power we can separate ourselves from Him. We may build up, of the black blocks of our sins flung up from the inner fires, and cemented with the bituminous mortar of our lusts and passions, a black wall between us and our Father. You and I have done it. We can build it—we cannot throw it down; we can rear it—we cannot tunnel it. "Our iniquities are too strong for us."

Now notice that this great cry of despair in my text is the cry of a single soul. This is the only place in the Psalm in which the singular person is used. "Iniquities are too strong for us" is not sufficient. Each man must take guilt to himself. The recognition and confession of evil must be an intensely personal and individual act. My question to you, dear friend, is, Did you ever know it by experience? Going apart by yourself, away from everybody else, with no companions or confederates to lighten the load of your felt evil, forgetting tempters and associates and all other people, did you ever stand, you and God, face to face, with nobody to listen to the conference? And did you ever feel in that awful presence that whether the world was full of men or deserted and you the only survivor would make no difference to the personal responsibility and weight and guilt of your individual sin? Have you ever felt, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I"—solitary—"sinned." and confessed that iniquities are "too strong for me"?

II.—Now, let me say a word or two about the second clause of this great verse, the ringing cry of confident hope.

The confidence is, as I said, the child of despair. You will never go into that large place of assured trust in God's effacing finger passed over all your evil until you have come through the narrow pass, where the black rocks all but bar the traveller's foot, of conscious impotence to deal with your sin. You must, first of all, dear friend, go down into the depths, and learn to have no trust in

yourselves before you can rise to the heights, and rejoice in the hope of the glory and of the mercy of God. Begin with "too strong for me," and the impotent "me" leads on to the Almighty "Thou."

Then, do not forget that what was confidence on the Psalmist's part is knowledge on ours. "As for our transgressions, Thou wilt purge them away." You and I know why, and know how, Jesus Christ in His great work for us has vindicated the Psalmist's confidence, and has laid bare for the world's faith the grounds upon which that Divine power proceeds in its cleansing mercy. "Thou wilt purge them away," said he. "Christ hath borne our sins in His own body on the tree," says the New Testament. I have spoken about our impotence in regard to our own evil, considered under three aspects. I meant to have said more about Christ's work upon our sins, considered under some three aspects. But let me just, very briefly, touch upon them.

Jesus Christ, when trusted, will do for sin, as habit, what cannot be done without Him. He will give the motive to resist, which is lacking in the majority of cases. He will give the power to resist, which is lacking in all cases. He will put a new life and spirit into our nature which shall strengthen and transform our feeble wills, shall elevate and glorify our earthward trailing affections, shall make us love that which He loves, and aspire to that which He is, until we become, in the change from glory to glory, the reflections of the image of the Lord. As habit and as domin-

ant power within us, nothing will cast out the evil that we have entertained in our hearts except the power of the life of Christ Jesus, in His Spirit dwelling within us and making us clean. When "a strong man keeps his house his goods are in peace, but when a stronger than he cometh he taketh from him all his implements in which he trusteth and divideth his spoil." And so Christ has bound the strong man, in that one great sacrifice, on the Cross. And now He comes to each of us, if we will trust Him, and gives motives, power, pattern, hopes, which enable us to cast out the tyrant that has held dominion over us. "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

And I tell all of you, especially you young men and women, who presumably have noble aspirations and desires, that the only way to conquer the word, the flesh, and the devil, is to let Christ clothe you with His armour; and, as the prophet did in the old story, let Him lay His hand on your feeble hands whilst you aim the arrows and draw the bow, and then you will shoot, and not miss. Christ, and Christ alone, within us will make us powerful to cast out the evil.

In like manner, He, and He only, deals with sin, considered as guilt. Here is the living secret and centre of all Christ's preciousness and power—that He died on the Cross, and in His Spirit, which knew the drear desolation of being forsaken by God; and in His flesh, which bore the outward consequences of sin in death, as a sinful world knows it, "bare our sins and carried our sorrows," and that "by His stripes we are healed."

If you will trust yourselves to that mighty sacrifice, and, with no reservation, as if you could do anything, will cast your whole weight and burden upon Him, then the guilt will pass away, and the power of sin will be broken. Transgressions will be buried—"covered," as the original of my text has it—as with a great mound piled upon them, so that they shall never offend or smell rank to heaven any more, but be lost to sight for ever.

Christ can take away the barrier piled by sin between God and the human spirit. Solid and black as it stands, His blood dropped upon it melts it away. Then it disappears like the black bastions of the aërial structures in the clouds before the sunshine. He hath opened for us a new and living way, that we might "have access with confidence," and, sinners as we are, that we might dwell for evermore at the side of our Lord.

So, dear brother, whilst humanity cries—and I pray that all of us may cry like the Apostle: "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—faith lifts up, swift and clear, her ringing note of triumph, which I pray God—or, rather, which I beseech you that you will make your own—"I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

VII.

Why the Talent was Buried.

"Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth."—MATT. xxv. 24, 25.

THAT was a strangely insolent excuse for indolence. To charge an angry master to his face with grasping greed and injustice was certainly not the way to conciliate him. Such language is quite unnatural and incongruous until we remember the reality which the parable was meant to shadow—viz., the answers for their deeds which men will give at Christ's judgment bar. Then we can understand how, by some irresistible necessity, this man was compelled, even at the risk of increasing the indignation of the master, to turn himself inside out, and to put into harsh, ugly words the half conscious thoughts which had guided his life and caused his unfaithfulness. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." The unabashed impudence of such an excuse for idleness as this is but putting into vivid

and impressive form this truth, that then a man's actions in their true character, and the ugly motives that underlie them, and which he did not always honestly confess to himself, will be clear before him. It will be as much of a surprise to the men themselves, in many cases, as it will be to the listeners. Thus it becomes us to look well to the underside of our lives, the unspoken convictions and the unformulated motives which work all the more mightily upon us because, for the most part, they work in the dark. This is Christ's explanation of one very operative and fruitful cause of the refusal to serve him.

I.—I ask you, then, to consider, first, the slander here and the truth that contradicts it. "I knew thee that thou art an hard man," says he, "reaping where thou hast not sown" (and he was standing with the unused talent in his hand all the while), "and gathering where thou hast not strawed." That is to say, deep down in many a heart, that has never said as much to itself, there lies this black drop of gall—a conception of the Divine character rather as demanding than as giving, a thought of Him as exacting. What He requires is more considered than what He bestows. So religion is thought to be mainly a matter of doing certain things and rendering up certain sacrifices, instead of being regarded, as it really is, as mainly a matter of receiving from God. Christ's authority makes me bold to say that this error underlies the lives of an immense number of nominal Christians, of people that think themselves very good religious people, as well as the

lives of thousands who stand apart from religion altogether. And I want, not to drag down any curtain by my own hand, but to ask you to lift away the veil which hides the ugly thing in your hearts, and to put your own consciousness to the bar of your own conscience, and say whether it is not true that the uppermost thought about God, when you think about Him at all, is, "Thou art a hard man, reaping where Thou hast not sown."

It is not difficult to understand why such a thought of God should rise in a heart which has no delight in Him nor in His service. There is a side to the truth as to God's relations to man which gives a colour of plausibility to the slander. Grave and stringent requirements are made by the Divine law upon each of us; and our consciences tell us that they have not been kept. Therefore, we seek to persuade ourselves that they are too severe. Then, further, we are, by reason of our own selfishness, almost incapable of rising to the conception of God's pure, perfect, disinterested love; and we are far too blind to the benefits that He pours upon us all every day of our lives. And so from all these reasons taken together, and some more besides, it comes about that, for some of us, the blessed sun in the heavens, the God of all mercy and love, has been darkened into a lurid orb shorn of all its beneficent beams, and hanging threatening there in our misty sky. "I knew Thee that Thou art an hard man." Ah! I am sure that if men and women would go down in the deep places of their own

hearts, and ask themselves what their real thought of God is, they would acknowledge that it is something like that.

Now turn to the other side. What is the truth that smites this slander to death? That God is perfect, pure, unmingled, infinite love. And what is love? The infinite desire to impart itself. His "nature and property" is to be merciful, and you can no more stop God from giving than you can shut up the rays of the sun within itself. To be and to bestow are for Him one and the same thing. His love is an infinite longing to bestow which passes over into perpetual acts of beneficence. He never reaps where He has not sown. Is there any place where He has not sown? Is there any heart on which there have been no seeds of goodness scattered from His rich hand? The calumniator in the text was speaking his slanders with that in his hand which should have stopped his mouth. He who complained that the hard master was asking for fruit of what He had not given would have had nothing at all if he had not obtained the one talent from His hand. And there is no place in the whole wide universe of God where His love has not scattered its beneficent gifts. There are no fallow fields out of cultivation and unsown in His great farm. He never asks where He has not given.

He never asks until after He has given. He begins with bestowing, and it is only after the vineyard has been planted on the very fruitful hill, and the hedge built round about it, and the winepress

digged, and the tower erected, and miracles of long-suffering mercy and skilful patience have been lavished upon it, that then He looks that it should bring forth grapes. God's gifts precede His requirements. He ever sows before He reaps. More than that, He gives *what* He asks, helping us to render to Him the hearts that He desires. He, by His own merciful communications, makes it possible that we should lay at His feet the tribute of loving thanks. Just as a parent will give a child some money in order that the child may go and buy the giver a birthday present, so God gives to us hearts, and enriches them with many bestowments. He scatters round about us good from His hand, like drops of a fragrant perfume from a blazing torch, in order that we may catch them up and have some portion of the joy which is especially His own—the joy of giving. It would be a poor affair if our sole relation to God was that of receiving. It would be a tyrannous affair if our sole relation to God was that of rendering up. But both are united, and if it be "more blessed to give than to receive," the Giver of all good does not leave us without the opportunity of entering in even to that superlative blessing. We have to come to Him and say, when we lay the gifts, either of our faculties or of our trust, of our riches or of our virtues, at His feet, "All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee."

He asks for our sakes, and not for His own. "If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the cattle upon a thousand hills are Mine. Offer

unto God praise, and pay thy vows unto the Most High." It is blessed to us to render. He is none the richer for all our giving, as He is none the poorer for all His. Yet His giving is real to us, and our giving is real and a joy to Him. That is the truth lifted up against the slander of the natural heart. God is love, pure giving, unlimited and perpetual disposition to bestow. He gives all things before He asks for anything, and when He asks for anything it is that we may be blessed.

Ah! you say, "It's all very well—where do you learn all that about God?" My answer is a very simple one. I learn it, and I believe there is no other place to learn it, at the Cross of Jesus Christ. If that be the very apex of the Divine love and self-revelation; if, looking upon it, we understand God better than by any other means, then there can be no question but that instead of gathering where He has not strawed, and reaping where He has not sown, God is only, and always, and utterly, and to every man, infinite love that bestows itself. My heart says to me many a time, "God's laws are hard, God's judgment is strict. God requires what you cannot give. Crouch before Him, and be afraid." And my faith says, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" "He that spared not His own Son, . . how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" The Cross of Christ is the answer to the slander, and the revelation of the giving God.

II.—Secondly, mark here the Fear that dogs such a thought, and the Love that casts out the fear.

"I was afraid!" Yes! of course. If a man is not a fool, his emotions follow his thoughts, and his thoughts ought to shape his emotions. And wherever there is the twilight of uncertainty upon the great lesson that the Cross of Jesus Christ has taught us, there there will be, however masked and however modified by other thoughts, deep in the human heart a perhaps unspoken but not, therefore, ineffectual dread of God. Just as the misconception of the Divine character does influence many a life in which it has never been spoken articulately, and needs some steady observation of ourselves to be detected, so with this dread of Him. Carry the task of self-examination a little bit further, and ask yourselves whether there does not lie coiled in many of your hearts this dread of God, like a sleeping snake, which only needs a little warmth to be awakened to sting. There are all the signs of it. There are many of you who have a distinct indisposition to be brought close up to the thought of Him. There are many of you who have a distinct sense of discomfort when you are pressed against the realities of the Christian religion. There are many of you who, though you cover it over with a shallow confidence, or endeavour to persuade yourselves with speculative doubts about the Divine nature, or hide it from yourselves by indifference, yet know that all that is very thin ice, and that there is a great black pool down below—a dread at the heart, of a righteous Judge somewhere, with whom you have somewhat to do that you cannot break off. I do not want to appeal to fear, but it goes

to one's heart to see the hundreds and thousands of people round about who, just because they are afraid of God, will not think about Him, put away angrily and impatiently solemn words like these that I am trying to speak, and try to surround themselves with some kind of a fool's paradise of indifference, and to shut their eyes to facts and realities. You do not confess it to yourselves. What kind of a thought must that be about your relation to God which you are afraid to speak? Some of you remember the awful words in one of Shakespeare's plays: "Now I, to comfort him, bid him he should not think of God. I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet." What does that teach us? "I knew Thee that Thou art an hard man; and I was afraid."

Dear friend, there are two religions in this world, there is the religion of fear and there is the religion of love, and if you have not the one you must have the other, if you have any at all. The only way to get perfect love that casts out fear is to be quite sure of the Father-love in heaven that begets it. And the only way to be sure of the Infinite love in the heavens that kindles some little spark of love in our hearts here is to go to Christ and learn the lesson that He reveals to us at His Cross. Love will annihilate the fear; or rather, if I may take such a figure, will set a light to the wreathing smoke that rises and flash it all up into a ruddy flame. For the perfect love that casts out fear sublimes it into reverence and

changes it into trust. Have you got that love, and did you get it at Christ's Cross?

III.—Lastly, mark the torpor of fear and the activity of love. "I was afraid, and I went and hid thy talent in the earth."

Fear paralyzes service, cuts the nerves of activity, makes a man refuse obedience to God. It was a very illogical thing of that indolent servant to say, "I knew that you were so hard in exacting what was due to you, therefore I determined *not* to give it to you." Is it more illogical and more absurd than what hundreds of men and women round about us do to-day, when they say, "God's requirements are so great that I do *not* attempt to fulfil them"? One would have thought that he would have reasoned the other way, and said, "Because I knew that Thy requirements were so great and severe, therefore I put myself with all my powers to my work." Not so. Logical or illogical, the result remains, that that thought of God, that black drop of gall, in many a heart, stops the action of the hand. Fear is barren, or if it produces anything it is nothing to the purpose, and it brings gifts that not even God's love can accept, for there is no love in them. Fear is barren; love is fruitful—like the two mountains of Samaria, from one of which the rolling burden of the curses of the Law was thundered, and from the other of which the sweet words of promise and of blessing were chanted in musical response. On the one side are black rocks, without a blade of grass on them, the Mount of Cursing; on the other side are blushing grapes and vineyards, the Mount

of Blessing. Love moves to action, fear paralyzes into indolence. And the reason why such hosts of you do nothing for God is because your hearts have never been touched with the thorough conviction that He has done everything for you, and asks you but to love Him back again, and bring Him your hearts. These dark thoughts are like the frost which binds the ground in iron fetters, making all the little flowers that were beginning to push their heads above the ground draw back again. And love, when it comes, will come like the west wind and the sunshine of the Spring; and before its emancipating fingers the earth's fetters will be cast aside, and the white snowdrops and the yellow crocuses will show themselves above the ground. If you want your hearts to bear any fruit of noble living, of holy consecration, of pure deeds, then here is the process —Begin with the knowledge and belief of "the love which God hath to us"; learn that at the Cross, and let it silence your doubts, and send them back to their kennels, silenced. Then take the next step, and love Him back again. "We love Him because He first loved us." That love will be the productive principle of all glad obedience, and you will keep His commandments; and here upon earth find, as the faithful servant found, that talents used increase; and yonder will receive the eulogium from His lips whom to please is blessedness, by whom to be praised is Heaven and glory "Well done! good and faithful servant!"

VIII.

God's Certainties and Man's Certitudes.

"For how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea: wherefore also through Him is the amen."—2 Cor. i. 20 (R V.).

THIS is one of the many passages the force and beauty of which are, for the first time, brought within the reach of an English reader by the alterations in the Revised Version. These are partly dependent upon the reading of the text and partly upon the translation. As the words stand in our Old Version, "yea" and "amen" seem to be very nearly synonymous expressions, and to point substantially to the same thing—viz., that Jesus Christ is, as it were, the confirmation and seal of God's promises. But in the Revised Version the alterations, especially in the pronouns, indicate more distinctly that the Apostle means two different things by the "yea" and the "amen." The one is God's voice, the other is man's. The one has to do with the certainty of the Divine revelation, the other has to do with the certitude of our faith in the revelation. When God speaks in

Christ, He confirms everything that He has said before, and when we listen to God speaking in Christ, our lips are, through Christ, opened to shout our assenting "Amen" to His great promises. So, then, we have the double form of our Lord's work, covering the whole ground of His relations to man, set forth in these two clauses, in the one of which God's confirmation of His past revelations by Jesus Christ is treated of, and in the other of which the hope and confident assent which men may give to that revelation is set before us. I deal, then, with these two points—God's certainties in Christ, and man's certitudes through Christ.

Now these two things do not go together always. We may be very certain, as far as our persuasion is concerned, of a very doubtful fact, or we may be very doubtful, as far as our persuasion is concerned, of a very certain fact. We speak about truths or facts as being certain, and we ought to mean by that, not how we think about them, but what they are in the evidence on which they rest. A certain truth is a truth which has its evidence irrefragable; and the only fitting attitude for men, in the presence of a certain truth, is to have a certainty of the truth. And these two things are, our Apostle tells us, both given to us in and through Jesus Christ. Let me deal, then, with these two sides.

I.—First, God's certainties in Christ.

Of course the original reference of the text is to the whole series of great promises given in the Old Testament. These, says Paul, are sealed and confirmed to men by the revelation and work of Jesus Christ, but it is obvious that the principle

which is good in reference to them is good on a wider field. I venture to take that extension, and to ask you to think briefly about some of the things that are made for us indubitably certain in Jesus Christ.

And, first of all, there is the certainty about God's heart. Everywhere else we have only peradventures, hopes, fears, guesses more or less doubtful, and round-about inferences as to His disposition and attitude towards us. As one of the old divines says somewhere, "all other ways of knowing God are like the bended bow. Christ is the straight string." The only means by which, indubitably, as a matter of demonstration, men can be sure that God in the heavens has a heart of love towards them is by Jesus Christ. For consider what will make us sure of that. Nothing but facts; words are of little use, arguments are of little use. A revelation, however precious, which simply says to us "God is Love," is not sufficient for our need. We want to see love in operation if we are to be sure of it, and the only demonstration of the love of God is to witness the love of God in actual working. And you get it where? On the Cross of Jesus Christ. I do not believe that anything else irrefragably establishes the fact for the yearning hearts of us poor men who want love, and yet cannot grope our way in amidst the mysteries and the clouds in providence and nature, except this—"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

The question may arise in some minds, Is there

any need for proving God's love? The question never arose except within the limits of Christianity. It is only men who have lived all their lives in an atmosphere saturated by Christian sentiment and conviction that ever come to the point of saying, "We do not want historical revelation to prove to us the fact of a loving God." They would never have fancied that they did not need the revelation unless, unconsciously to themselves, and indirectly, all their thoughts had been coloured and illuminated by the revelation that they professed to reject. God as Love is "our dearest faith, our ghastliest doubt," and the only way to make absolutely certain of the fact that His heart is full of mercy to us is to look upon Him as He stands revealed to us, not merely in the words of Christ, for, precious as they are, these are the smallest part of His revelation, but in the life and in the death which open for us the heart of God. Remember what He said Himself, *not* "he that hath listened to Me, doth understand the Father," but "he that hath *seen* Me hath seen the Father." "In Him is yea." And the hopes and shadowy fore-revelations of the loving heart of God are confirmed by the fact of His life and death. God *establishes*, not "commends," as our translation has it, "His love towards us in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Further, in Him we have the certainty of pardon. Every deep heart-experience amongst men has felt the necessity of having a clear cer-

tainty and knowledge about forgiveness. Men do not feel it always. A man can skate over the surface of the great deeps that lie beneath the most frivolous life, and may suppose, in his superficial way of looking at things, that there is no need for any definite teaching about sin, and the mode of dealing with it. But once bring that man face to face, in a quiet hour, with the facts of his life and of a Divine law, and all that superficial ignoring of evil in himself, and of the dread of punishment and consequences, passes away. I am sure of this, that no religion will ever go far and last long and work mightily, and lay a sovereign hand upon human life, which has not a most plain and decisive message to preach in reference to pardon. And I am sure of this, that one reason for the comparative feebleness of much so-called Christian teaching in this generation is just that the deepest needs of a man's conscience are not met by it. In a religion on which the whole spirit of a man may rest itself, there must be a very plain message about what is to be done with sin. The only message which answers to the needs of an awakened conscience and an alarmed heart is the old-fashioned message that Jesus Christ the Righteous has died for us sinful men. All other religions have felt after a clear doctrine of forgiveness, and all have failed to find it. Here is the Divine "Yea!" And on it alone we can suspend the whole weight of our soul's salvation. The rope that is to haul us out of the horrible pit and the miry clay had much need to be tested before we commit ourselves to it. There are plenty of easy-going superficial theories about

forgiveness predominant in the world to-day. Except the one that says, "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sin," they are all like the rope let down into the dark mine to lift the captives beneath, half of the strands of which have been cut on the sharp edge above, and when the weight hangs to it, it will snap. There is nothing on which a man who has once learned the tragical meaning and awful reality and depth of the fact of transgression can suspend his forgiveness, except this, that "Christ has died, the just for the unjust, to bring us unto God." "In Him the promise is yea."

And, again, we have in Christ Divine certainties in regard of life. We have in Him the absolutely perfect pattern to which we are to conform our whole doings. And so, notwithstanding that there may, and will still, be many uncertainties and much perplexity, we have the great broad lines of morals and of duty traced with a firm hand, and all that we need to know of obligation and of perfectness lies in this—be like Jesus Christ! So the solemn commandments of the ethical side of Divine revelation, as well as the promises of it, get their "yea" in Jesus Christ. And He stands the Law of our lives.

We have certainties for life, in the matter of protection, guidance, supply of all necessity, and the like, treasured and garnered in Jesus Christ. For He not only confirms, but fulfils, the promises which God has made. If we have that dear Lord for our very own, and He belongs to us as He does belong to them who love Him and trust Him, then

in Him we have in actual possession these promises, how many soever they be, which are given by God's other words.

Christ is Protean, and becomes everything to each man that each man requires. He is, as it were, "a box where sweets compacted lie." "In Him are hid all the treasures," not only of wisdom and knowledge, but of Divine gifts, and we have but to go to Him in order to have that which at each moment, as it emerges, we most require. As in some of those sunny islands of the Southern Pacific, one tree supplies the people with all that they need for their simple wants, fruit for their food, leaves for their houses, staves, thread, needles, clothing, drink, everything—so Jesus Christ, this Tree of Life, is Himself the sum of all the promises, and, having Him, we have everything that we need.

And, lastly, in Christ we have the Divine certainties as to the future, over which, apart from Him, lie cloud and darkness. As I said about the revelation of the heart of God, so I say about the revelation of a future life—a verbal revelation is not enough. We have enough of arguments; what we want is facts. We have enough of man's peradventures about a future life, enough of evidence more or less valid to show that it is "probable," or "not inconceivable," or more "likely than not," and so on and so on. What we want is that somebody shall cross the gulf and come back again. And so we get in the Resurrection of Christ the one fact on which men may safely rest their convictions of immortality. And I do not

think that there is a second anywhere. On it alone, as I believe, hinges the whole answer to the question—"If a man die, shall he live again?" This generation is brought, in my reading of it, right up to this alternative—Christ's Resurrection, or we die like the brutes that perish. "All the promises of God in Him are yea."

II.—And now a word as to the second portion of my text—viz., man's certitudes, which answer to God's certainties.

The latter are *in* Christ, the former are *through* Christ. Now it is clear that the only fitting attitude for professing Christians in reference to these certainties of God is the attitude of unhesitating affirmation and joyful assent. Certitude is the fitting response to certainty.

There should be some kind of correspondence between the firmness with which we grasp, the tenacity with which we hold, the assurance with which we believe these great truths, and the rock-like firmness and immovableness of the evidence upon which they rest. It is a poor compliment to God to come to His most veracious affirmations, sealed with the broad seal of His Son's life and death, and to answer with a hesitating "Amen," that falters and almost sticks in our throat. Build rock upon rock. Be certain of the certain things. Grasp with a firm hand the firm stay. Immovably cling to the immovable foundation; and though you be but like the limpet on the rock, hold fast by the Rock, as the limpet does; for it is an insult to the certainty of the revelation, when there is hesitation in the believer.

I need not dwell for more than a moment upon the lamentable contrast which is presented between this certitude, which is our only fitting attitude, and the hesitating assent and half-belief in which so many professing Christians pass their lives. The reasons for that are partly moral, partly intellectual. This is not a day which is favourable to the unhesitating avowal of convictions in reference to an unseen world, and many of us are afraid of being called narrow, or dogmatisers, and think it looks like breadth, and liberality, and culture, and I know not what, to say "Well! perhaps it is, but I am not quite sure; I think it is, but I will not commit myself." All the promises of God, which in Him are yea, ought through Him to get from us an "Amen."

There is a great deal that will always be uncertain. The firmer our convictions, the fewer will be the things that they grasp; but if they be few, they will be big, and enough for us. Those truths certified in Christ concerning the heart of God, the message of pardon, the law for life, the gifts of guidance, defence, and sanctifying, the sure and certain hope of immortality—these things we ought to be sure about, whatever borderland of uncertainty may lie beyond them. The Christian verb is "we *know*," not "we hope, we calculate, we infer, we think," but "we *know*." And it becomes us to apprehend for ourselves the full blessedness and power of the certitude which Christ has given to us by the certainties which He has brought us.

I need not speak about the blessedness of such

a calm assurance, about the need of it for power, for peace, for effort, for fixedness in the midst of a world and age of change. But I must, before I close, point you to the only path by which that certitude is attainable. "*Through* Him is the amen. He is the Door. The truths which He confirms are so inextricably intertwined with Himself that you cannot get them and put away Him. Christ's relation to Christ's Gospel is not the relation of other teachers to their words. You may accept the words of a Plato, whatever you think of the Plato who spoke the words. But you cannot separate Christ and His teaching in that fashion, and you must have *Him* if you are to get *it*. So faith in Him, the intellectual acceptance of Him, as the authoritative and infallible Revealer, the bowing down of heart and will to Him as our Commander and our Lord, the absolute trust in Him as the foundation of all our hope and the source of all our blessedness—that is the way to certitude. And there is no other road that we can take.

If thus we keep near Him our faith will bring us the present experience and fulfilment of the promises, and we shall be sure of them, because we have them already. And whilst men are asking, "Do we know anything about God? Is there a God at all? Is there such a thing as forgiveness? Can anybody find anywhere absolute rules for his life? Is there anything beyond the grave but mist and darkness?" we can say, "One thing I know, Jesus Christ is my Saviour, and in Him I know God, and pardon, and duty, and

sanctifying, and safety, and immortality; and whatever is dark, this, at least, is sun-clear." Get high enough up and you will be above the fog; and while the men down in it are squabbling as to whether there is anything outside the mist, you, from your sunny station, will see the far-off coasts, and haply catch some whiff of perfume from their shore, and see some glinting of a glory upon the shining turrets of "the city that hath foundations." We have a present possession of all the promises of God; and whoever doubts their certitude, the man that knows himself a son of God by faith, and has experience of forgiveness and guidance and answered prayer and hopes whose "sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality," *knows* the things which others question and doubt.

So live near Jesus Christ, and, holding fast by His hand, you may lift up your joyful "Amen" to everyone of God's "yeas." For in Him we know the Father, in Him we know that we have the forgiveness of sins, in Him we know that God is near to bless and succour and guide, and in Him "we know that, though our earthly house were dissolved, we have a building of God." Wherefore we are always confident; and when the Voice from Heaven says "Yea!" our choral shout may go up, "Amen! Thou art the faithful and true witness."

IX.

The Anointing which Establishes.

"Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God."—2 Cor. i. 21.

THE connection in which these words occur is a remarkable illustration of the Apostle's habit of looking at the most trivial things in the light of the highest truths. He had been obliged, as the context informs us, to abandon an intended visit to Corinth. The miserable crew of antagonists, who yelped at his heels all his life, seized this change of purpose as the occasion for a double-barrelled charge. They said he was either fickle and infirm of purpose, or insincere, and saying "Yea" with one side of his mouth and "Nay" with the other. He rebuts this accusation with apparently quite disproportionate vehemence and great solemnity. He points in the context to the faithfulness of God, to the firm Gospel which he had preached, to God's great "Yea!" as his answer. He says in effect, "How could I, with such a word burning in my heart, move in a region

of equivocation and double-dealing? or how could I, whose whole being is saturated with so firm and stable a Gospel, be unreliable and fickle? The message must make the messenger like itself. Communion with a faithful God must make faith-keeping men; the certainties of God's 'Yea' and the certitudes of our 'Amen' must influence our characters." And so to suppose that a man influenced by Christianity is a weak, double-dealing, unsteadfast man is a contradiction in terms. In the text he carries his argument a step further, and points, not only to the power of the Gospel to steady and confirm, but also to the fact that God Himself communicates to the believing soul Christian stability by the anointing which He bestows.

So, then, we have in these words the declaration that inflexible, immovable steadfastness is a mark of a Christian, and that this Christian steadfastness, without which there is no Christianity worth the naming, is a direct gift from God Himself by means of that great anointing which He confers upon men. To that thought, in one or two of its aspects, I ask your attention.

I.—Notice the deep source of this Christian steadfastness.

The language of the original, carefully considered, seems to me to bear this interpretation, that the "anointing" of the second clause is the means of the "establishing" of the first—that is to say, that God confers Christian steadfastness of character by the bestowment of the unction of His Divine Spirit.

Now notice how deep Paul digs in order to get a foundation for a common virtue. There are many ways by which men may cultivate the tenacity and steadfastness of purpose which ought to mark us all. Much discipline may be brought to bear in order to secure that; but the text says the deepest ground upon which it can be rested is nothing less Divine and solemn than this, the actual communication to men, to feeble, vacillating, fluctuating wills, and treacherous, wayward, wandering hearts, of the strength and fixedness which are given by God's own Spirit.

I suppose I need not remind you that from beginning to end of Scripture "anointing" is taken as the symbol of the communication of a true Divine influence. The oil laid on the head of prophet, priest, and king was but the expression of the communication to the recipient of a Divine influence which fitted him, as well as designated him, for the office that he filled. And although it is aside from my present purpose, I may just, in a sentence, point to the felicity of the emblem. It is the flowing oil, which smoothes the surface upon which it is spread, which supples the limbs, and which is nutritive and illuminating; thus giving an appropriate emblem of the secret, silent, quickening, nourishing, enlightening influences of that Spirit which God gives to all His sons.

And inasmuch as here this oil of the Divine Spirit is stated as being the true ground and basis of Christian steadfastness, it is obvious that the anointing intended cannot be that of mere designation to, and inspiration for, apostolic or other office,

but must be the universal possession of all Christian men and women. "Ye," says another apostle, speaking to the whole democracy of the Christian Church, and not to any little group of selected aristocrats therein—"ye have an unction from the Holy One," and every man and woman that has a living grasp of the living Christ receives from Him this great gift.

Then, notice further that this anointing of a Divine Spirit, which is a true source of life to those that possess it, is derived from, and parallel with, Christ's anointing. We use the word "Christ" as a proper name, and forget what it means. The "Christ" is *the Anointed One*. And do you think that it was a mere accident, or the result of a scanty vocabulary, which compelled the Apostle, in these two contiguous clauses, to cognate words when he said:—"He that establisheth us with you in the *Anointed*, and hath *anointed* us, is God." Did he not mean to say thereby, "Each of you, in a very true sense, if you are a Christian, is a *Christ*"? You, too, are anointed; you, too, are God's Messiahs. On you the same Spirit rests in a measure which dwelt without measure in Him. The chief of Christ's gift to the Church is the gift of His own life. All His Brethren are anointed with the oil that was poured upon His head, even as the oil upon Aaron's locks percolated to the very skirts of his garments. Being anointed with the anointing which was on Him, all His people may claim an identity of nature, may hope for an identity of destiny, and are bound to a prolongation of part of His function and a similarity of character. If He

by that anointing was made Prophet, Priest, and King for the world, all His children partake of these offices in subordinate but real fashion, and are prophets to make God known to men, priests to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and kings at least over themselves, and, if they will, over a world which obeys and serves those that serve and love God. Ye are anointed—"Messiahs" and "Christs," by derivation of the life of Jesus Christ.

And if these things be true, it is plain enough how this Divine unction, which is granted to all Christians, lies at the root of steadfastness.

We talk a great deal about the gentleness of Christ; we cannot celebrate it too much, but we may forget that it is the gentleness of strength. We do not sufficiently mark the masculine features in that character, the tremendous tenacity of will, the inflexible fixedness of purpose, the irremovable constancy of obedience in the face of all temptations to the contrary. The figure that rises before us is of the Christ yearning over weaklings far oftener than it is of the Christ with knitted brow, and tightened lips, and far-off gazing eye, "steadfastly setting His face to go to Jerusalem," and followed, as He pressed up the rocky road from Jericho, by that wondering group, astonished at the rigidity of purpose that was stamped on His features. That Christ gives us His Spirit to make us tenacious, constant, righteously obstinate, inflexible in the pursuit of all that is lovely and of good report, like Himself. That Divine Spirit will cure the fickleness of our natures; for our wills are never fixed till they are fixed in obedience, and never free until

they elect to serve Him. That Divine Spirit will cure the wandering of our hearts and bind us to Himself. It will lift us above the selfish and cowardly dependence on externals and surroundings, men and things, in which we are all tempted to live. We are all too like aneroid barometers, that go up and down with every variation of a foot or two in the level, but if we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us it will cut the bonds that bind us to the world, and give us possession of a deeper love than can be sustained by, or is derived from, these superficial sources. The true possession of the Divine Spirit, if I might use such a metaphor, sets a man on an isolating stool, and all the currents that move round about him are powerless to reach him. If we have that Divine Spirit within us, it will give us an experience of the preciousness and the truth, the certitude and the sweetness of Christ's Gospel, which will make it impossible that we should ever "cast away the confidence which has" such "recompense of reward." No man will be surely bound to the truth and person of Christ with bonds that cannot be snapped except he who in his heart has the knowledge which is possession, by the gift of that Divine Spirit to knit him to Jesus Christ.

So, dear friends, whilst the world is full of wise words about steadfastness, and exalts determination of character and fixity of purpose, rightly, as the basis of all good, our Gospel comes to us poor, light, thistledown creatures, and lets us see how we can be steadfast and settled by being fastened to a steadfast and settled Christ. When storms are

raging they lash light articles on deck to holdfasts. Let us lash ourselves to the abiding Christ, and we, too, shall abide.

II.—In the next place, notice the aim or purpose of this Christian steadfastness.

"He stablisheth us with you in Christ," or, as the original has it even more significantly, *into* or "*unto* Christ." Now that seems to me to imply two things—first, that our steadfastness, made possible by our possession of that Divine Spirit, is steadfastness in our relations to Jesus Christ. We are established in reference or in regard to Him. In other words, what Paul here means is, first, a fixed conviction of the truth that He is the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, and my Saviour. That is the first step. Men who are steadfast without their intellect guiding and settling the steadfastness are not steadfast, but obstinate and pigheaded. We are meant to be guided by our understandings, and no fixity is anything better than the immobility of a stone, unless it be based upon a distinct and whole-brained intellectual acceptance of Jesus Christ as the All-in-all for us, for life and death, for inward and outward being.

Paul means, next, a steadfastness in regard to Christ of our trust and love. Surely if from Him there is for ever streaming out an unbroken flow of tenderness, there should be ever on our sides an equally unbroken opening of our hearts for the reception of His love, and an equally uninterrupted response to it in our grateful affection. There can be no more damning condemnation of the vacillations and fluctuations of Christian men's

affections than the steadfastness of Christ's love to them. He loves ever; He is unalterable in the communication and effluence of His heart. Surely it is most fitting that we should be steadfast in our devotion and answering love to Him. And Paul means not only fixedness of intellectual conviction and continuity of loving response, but also habitual obedience, which is always ready to do His will.

So we answer His "Yea!" with our "Amen!" and having an unchanging Christ to rest upon, rest upon Him unchanging. The broken, fluctuating affections and trusts and obediences which mark so much of the average Christian life of this day are only too sad proofs of how scant our possession of that Spirit of steadfastness must be believed to be. God's "Yea" is answered by our faltering "Amen"; God's truth is hesitatingly accepted; God's love is partially returned; God's work is slothfully and negligently done. "Be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

Another thought is suggested by these words—viz., that such steadfastness as we have been trying to describe has for its result a deeper penetration into Jesus Christ and a fuller possession of Him. The only way by which we can grow nearer and nearer to our Lord is by steadfastly keeping beside Him. You cannot get the spirit of a landscape unless you sit down and gaze, and let it soak into you. The cheap tripper never sees the lake. You cannot get to know a man until you summer and winter with him. No subject worth studying opens itself out to the hasty glance. Was it not Sir Isaac Newton who used to say, "I have no genius, but I

keep a subject before me"? "Abide in Me; as the branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me." Continuous, steadfast adhesion to Him is the condition of growing up into his likeness, and receiving more and more of His beauty into our waiting hearts. "Wait on the Lord; wait, I say, on the Lord."

III.—Lastly, notice the very humble and common-place sphere in which the Christian steadfastness manifests itself.

It was nothing of more importance than that Paul had said he was going to Corinth, and did not, on which he brings all this array of great principles to bear. From which I gather just this thought, that the highest gifts of God's grace and the greatest truths of God's Word are meant to regulate the tiniest things in our daily life. It is no degradation to the lightning to have to carry messages. It is no profanation of the sun to gather its rays into a burning glass to light a kitchen fire with. And it is no unworthy use of the Divine Spirit that God gives to His children to say it will keep a man from hasty and precipitate decisions as to little things in life, and from chopping and changing about, with levity of purpose and without a sufficient reason. If our religion is not going to influence the trifles, what is it going to influence? Our life is made up of trifles, and if these are not its field, where is its field? You may be quite sure that, if your religion does not influence the little things, it will never influence the big ones. If it has not power enough to guide the horses when they are at a slow, sober walk, what do you think it will do when they are

at a gallop and plunging! "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." So let us see to two things—first, that all our religion is worked into our life, for only so much of it as is so inwrought is our religion, and, second, that all our life is brought under the sway of motives derived from our religion; for only in proportion as it is, will it be pure and good.

And as regards this special virtue and prime quality of steadfastness and fixedness of purpose, you can do no good in the world without it. Unless a man can hold his own, and turn an obstinate negative to the temptations that lie thick about him, he will never come to any good at all, either in this life or in the next. The basis of all excellence is a wholesome disregard of externals, and the cultivation of a strong self-reliant and self-centred, because God-trusting and Christ-centred, will. And I tell you, especially you young men and women, if you want to do or be anything worth doing or being, you must try to get your natures hardened into being "steadfast, immovable." There is only one infallible way of doing it, and that is to let the "strong Son of God" live in you, and in Him to find your strength for resistance, your strength for obedience, your strength for submission. "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

There are two types of men in the world. That one has his emblem in the chaff, rootless with no hold, swept out of the threshing-floor by every gust of wind. That resembles many whose

principles lie at the mercy of the babble of tongues round about you, whose rectitude goes at a puff of temptation, like the smoke out of a chimney when the wind blows; who have no will for what is good, but live as it happens. The other type of man's emblem is the tree, rooted deep and therefore rising high, with its roots going as far underground as its branches spread in the blue, and therefore green of leaf and rich of fruit. "We are made partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence, steadfast until the end."

X.

The Seal and Earnest.

"WHO hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."—2 COR. i. 22.

THERE are three strong metaphors in this and the preceding verse—"anointing," "sealing," and "giving the earnest"—all of which find their reality in some Divine act. These three metaphors all refer to the same subject, and what that subject is is sufficiently explained in the last of them. The "earnest" consists of "the Spirit in our hearts," and the same explanation might have been appended to both the preceding clauses, for the "anointing" is the anointing of the Spirit, and the "seal" is the seal of the Spirit. Further, these three metaphors all refer to one and the same act. They are not three things, but three aspects of one thing, just as a sunbeam might be regarded either as the source of warmth, or of light, or of chemical action. So the one gift of the one Spirit "anoints," "seals," and is the "earnest." Further, these three metaphors all declare a universal prerogative of Christians. Every man that loves Jesus Christ

has the Spirit in the measure of his faith. "And if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His."

I.—The first metaphor in the text: the "seal" of the Spirit.

A seal is impressed upon a recipient material, made soft by warmth, in order to leave there a copy of itself. And it is not fanciful, nor riding a metaphor to death, when I dwell upon these features of the emblem in order to suggest the analogies in Christian life. The Spirit of God comes into our spirits, and by gentle contact impresses upon the material, which was intractable until it was melted by the genial warmth of faith and love, the likeness of Itself, but yet so as that prominences correspond to the hollows, and what is in relief in the one is sunk in the other. Expand that general statement for a moment or two.

The effect of all the Divine indwelling, which is the characteristic gift of the Gospel to every Christian soul, is to mould the recipient into the image of the Divine inhabitant. There is in the human spirit—such is its dignity amidst its ruins, and its nobility shining through its degradation—a capacity of receiving the image of God which consists not only in voluntary and intelligent action and the consciousness of personal being, but in the love of the things that are fair, and in righteousness, and true holiness. His Spirit, entering into a heart, will there make that heart wise with its own wisdom, strong with some infusion of its own strength, gracious with some drops of its own grace, gentle with some softening from its own gentleness, holy with some purity

reflected from its own transcendent whiteness. The Spirit, which is life, moulds the heart into which it enters into a kindred, and, therefore, similar life.

There are, however, characteristics in this "seal" of the Spirit which are not so much copies as correspondences. That is to say, just as what is convex in the seal is concave in the impression, and *vice versâ*, so, when that Divine Spirit comes into our spirits, its promises will excite faith, its gifts will breed desire; to every bestowment there will answer an opening receptivity. Yearning love will correspond to the love that longs to dispense, the sense of need to the Divine fulness and sufficiency, emptiness to abundance, prayers to promises; the cry "Abba! Father!" the yearning consciousness of sonship, to the word "Thou art My Son"; and the upward eye of aspiration and petition, and necessity, and waiting, to the downward glance of love bestowing itself. The open heart answers to the extended hand, and the seal which God's Spirit impresses upon the heart that is submitted to it is of this two-fold character, resemblance in moral nature and righteousness, correspondence as regards the mysteries of the converse between the recipient and the giving God.

Then, mark, the material is made capable of receiving the stamp because it is warmed and softened. That is to say, my faith must prepare my heart for the sanctifying indwelling of that Divine Spirit. The hard wax may be struck with the seal, but it leaves no trace. God does not do with man as the coiner does with his blanks, put them cold

into a press, and by violence from without stamp an image upon them, but He does as men do with a seal, warms the wax first, and then, with a gentle firm touch, leaves the likeness there. So, brother! Learn this lesson: if you want to be good lie under the contact of the Spirit of righteousness, and see that your heart is warm.

Still further, note that this aggregate of Christian character, in likeness and correspondence, is the true sign that we belong to God. The seal is the mark of ownership, is it not? Where the broad arrow has been impressed everybody knows that that is royal property. And so this seal of God's Divine Spirit, in its effects upon my character, is the one token to myself and to other people that I belong to God, and that He belongs to me. Or, to put it into plain English, the only reason for any man's being regarded as a Christian is his possession of the likeness and correspondence to God which that Divine Spirit gives. Likeness and correspondence, I say, for the one class of results are the more open for the observation of the world, and the other class are the more of value for ourselves. I believe that Christian people ought to have, and are meant by that Divine Spirit dwelling in them to have, a consciousness that they are Christians, God's children, for their own peace and rest and joy. But you cannot use that in demonstration to other people; you may be as sure of it as you will, in your inmost hearts, but it is no sign to anybody else. And, on the other hand, there may be much of outward virtue and beauty of character which may lead other people to say about a man: "*That*

is a good Christian man, at any rate," and yet there may be in the heart an all but absolute absence of any joyful assurance that we are Christ's, and that He belongs to us. So the two things must go together. Correspondence, the spirit of sonship which meets His taking us as sons, the faith which clasps the promise, the reception which welcomes bestowment, must be stamped upon the inward life. For the outward life there must be the manifest impress of righteousness upon my actions if there is to be any real seal and token that I belong to Him. God writes His own name upon the men that are His. All their goodness, their gentleness, patience, hatred of evil, energy and strenuousness in service, submission in suffering, with whatsoever other radiance of human virtue may belong to them, are reallly "His mark!"

There is no other worth talking about, and to you Christian men I come and say, Be very sure that your professions of inward communion and happy consciousness that you are Christ's are verified to yourself and to others by a plain outward life of righteousness like the Lord's. Have you got that seal stamped upon your lives like the hall-mark that says, "This is genuine silver, and no plated Brummagem stuff"? Have you got that seal of a visible righteousness and every-day purity to confirm your assertion that you belong to Christ? And is it woven into the whole length of your being like the scarlet thread that is spun into every Admiralty cable as a sign that it is crown property? God's seal, visible to me and to nobody else, is my consciousness that I am His; but that conscious-

ness is vindicated and delivered from the possibility of illusion or hypocrisy only when it is checked and fortified by the outward evidence of the holy life that the Spirit of God has wrought.

Further, this sealing, which is thus the token of God's ownership, is also the pledge of security. A seal is stamped in order that there may be no tampering with what it seals; that it may be kept safe from all assaults, thieves, and violence. And in the metaphor of our text there is included this thought, too, which is also of an intensely practical nature. For it just comes to this—our true guarantee that we shall come at last into the sweet security and safety of the perfect state is present likeness to the indwelling Spirit and the present reception of Divine grace. The seal is the pledge of security, just because it is the mark of ownership. When, by God's Spirit dwelling in us, we are led to love the things that be fair, and to long after more possession of whatever things are of good report, that is like God's hoisting His flag upon a newly-annexed territory. And is He going to be so careless in the preservation of His property as that He will allow that which is thus acquired to slip away from Him? Does He account us as of so small value as to hold us with so slack a hand? But no man has a right to rest on the assurance of God's saving him into the heavenly kingdom unless He is saving him at this moment from the devil and his own evil heart. And, therefore, I say the Christian character, in its outward manifestations and in its sweet inward secrets of communion, is the guarantee that we shall not fall. Rest upon Him, and

He will hold you up. We are "kept by the power of God unto salvation," and that power keeps and that final salvation becomes ours "through faith."

II.—Now, secondly, turn to the other emblem, that "earnest" which consists in like manner "of the Spirit."

The "earnest," of course, is a small portion of purchase-money, or wages, or contract-money, which is given at the completion of the bargain as an assurance that the whole amount will be paid in due time. And, says the Apostle, this seal is also an earnest. It not only makes certain God's ownership and guarantees the security of those on whom it is impressed, but it also points onwards to the future, and at once guarantees that, and to a large extent reveals the nature of it. So, then, we have these two thoughts on which I touch.

The Christian character and experience is the earnest of the inheritance, in the sense of being its guarantee, inasmuch as the experiences of the Christian life here are plainly immortal. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the objective and external proof of a future life. The facts of the Christian life, its aspirations, its communion, its clasp of God as its very own, are the subjective and inward proofs of a future life. As a matter of fact, if you will take the Old Testament, you will see that the highest summits in it to which the hope of immortality soared spring directly from the experience of deep and blessed communion with the living God. When the Psalmist said "Thou wilt not leave my soul in *Sheol*; neither wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption," he was speaking a

conviction that had been floated into his mind on the crest of a great wave of religious enjoyment and communion. And, in like manner, when the other Psalmist said "Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever," he was speaking of the glimpse that he had got of the land that was very far off, from the height which he had climbed on the mount of fellowship with God. And for us, I suppose that the same experience holds good. Howsoever much we may say we believe in a future life, and in a heaven, we really grasp it as a fact that shall be true about ourselves, in the proportion in which here we are living in direct contact and communion with God. The conviction of immortality is the distinct and direct result of the present enjoyment of communion with Him, and it is a reasonable result. No man that has known what it is to turn himself to God with a glow of humble love, and to feel that he is not turning his face to vacuity, but to a face that looks on him with love, can believe that anything can ever come to destroy that communion. What have faith, love, aspiration, resignation, fellowship with God, to do with death? They cannot be cut through with the stroke that destroys physical life, any more than you can divide a sunbeam with a sword. It unites again, and the impotent edge passes through and has effected nothing. Death can shear asunder many bonds, but that invisible bond that unites the soul to God is of adamant, against which his scythe is in vain. Death is the grim porter that opens the door of a dark hole and herds us into it as sheep are driven into a slaughter-house. But to those who have

learned what it is to lay a trusting hand in God's hand, the grim porter is turned into the gentle damsel that keeps the door and opens it for light and warmth and safety to the hunted prisoner that has escaped from the dungeon of life. Death cannot touch communion, and the consciousness of communion with God is the earnest of the inheritance.

And it is so for another reason. All the results of the Divine Spirit's sealing of the soul are manifestly complete, and as manifestly tend towards completeness. The engine is clearly working only half-speed. It is obviously capable of much higher pressure than it is working at now. Those powers in the Christian man can plainly do a great deal more than they ever have done here, and are meant to do a great deal more. Is this imperfect Christianity of ours, our little faith, so soon shattered, our little love so quickly disproved, our faltering resolutions, our lame performances, our earthward cleavings—are these things all that Jesus Christ's bitter agony was for, and all that a Divine Spirit is able to make of us? Manifestly, here is but a segment of the circle, in heaven is the perfect round; and the imperfections in the work of so obviously Divine an Agent, so far as life is concerned, cry aloud for a region where tendency shall become result, and all that was in Him to make us we shall become. The road evidently leads upwards, and round that sharp corner where the black rocks come so near each other and our eyesight cannot travel, we may be sure it goes steadily up still to the top of the pass, until it reaches "the shining tablelands whereof our

God Himself is Sun and Moon," and brings us all to the city set on a hill.

And, further, that Divine seal is the earnest, inasmuch as itself is part of the whole. The truest and the loftiest conception that we can form of heaven is the perfecting of the religious experience of earth. The shilling or two given to the servant in old-fashioned days when he was hired is of the same currency as the balance that he is to get when the year's work is done. The small payment to-day comes out of the same purse, and is coined out of the same specie, and is part of the same currency of the same kingdom, as what we get when we go yonder, and count the endless riches to which we have fallen heirs at last. You have but to take the faith, the love, the obedience, the communion, of the highest of moments of the Christian life on earth, and take from them all their limitations, subtract from them all their imperfections, multiply them to their superlative possibility, endow them with a continual power of growth, and stretch them out to absolute eternity, and you get heaven. The earnest is of a piece with the inheritance.

So, dear brethren, here is a gift offered for us all, a gift which our feebleness sorely needs, a gift for every timid nature, for every weak will, for every man, woman, and child beset with snares and fighting with heavy tasks, the offer of a reinforcement as real and as sure to bring victory as when, on that day when the fate of Europe was determined, after long hours of conflict, the Prussian bugles blew, and the English commander knew that with the fresh troops that came on the field victory was

made certain. So you and I may have in our hearts the Spirit of God, the spirit of strength, the spirit of love and of a sound mind, the spirit of adoption, the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him to enlighten our darkness, to bind our hearts to Him, to quicken and energise our souls, to make the weakest among us strong, and the strong as an angel of God. And the condition on which we may get it is this simple one which the Apostle lays down. "*After that ye believed*, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance." The Christ who is the Lord and Giver of the Spirit has shown us how its blessed influences may be ours when, on the great day of the feast, He stood and cried with a voice that echoes across the centuries, and is meant for each of us, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth in Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive."

XI.

The Warrior Peace.

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ."—PHIL. iv. 7.

THE great Mosque of Constantinople was once a Christian church, dedicated to the Holy Wisdom. Over its western portal may still be read, graven on a brazen plate, the words, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." For four hundred years noisy crowds have fought, and sorrowed, and fretted beneath the dim inscription in an unknown tongue; and no eye has looked at it, nor any heart responded. It is but too sad a symbol of the reception which Christ's offers meet amongst men, and—blessed be His name!—its prominence there, though unread and unbelieved, is a symbol of the patient forbearance with which rejected blessings are once and again pressed upon us, and He stretches out His hand though no man regards, and calls though none do hear. My text

is Christ's offer of peace. The world offers excitement, Christ promises repose.

I.—Mark, then, first, this peace of God. What is it?

What are its elements? Whence does it come? It is of Him, as being its Source, or Origin, or Author, or Giver, but it belongs to Him in a yet deeper sense, for Himself is Peace. And in some humble but yet real fashion our restless and anxious hearts may partake in the Divine tranquillity, and with a calm repose, kindred with that rest from which it is derived, may enter into His rest.

If that be too high a flight, at all events the peace that may be ours was His, in the perfect and unbroken tranquillity of His perfect Manhood. What, then, are its elements? The peace of God must, first of all, be peace with God. Conscious friendship with Him is indispensable to all true tranquillity. Where that is absent there may be the ignoring of the disturbed relationship; but there will be no peace of heart. The indispensable requisite is "a conscience like a sea at rest." Unless we have made sure work of our relationship with God, and know that He and we are friends, there is no real repose possible for us. In the whirl of excitement we may forget, and for a time turn away from, the realities of our relation to Him, and so get such gladness as is possible to a life not rooted in conscious friendship with Him. But such lives will be like some of those sunny islands in the Eastern Pacific, extinct volcanoes, where Nature smiles and all things are prodigal and life is easy and luxuriant; but some day the clouds gather, and the earth

shakes, and fire pours forth, and the sea boils, and every living thing dies, and darkness and desolation come. You are living, brother, upon a volcano's side, unless the roots of your being are fixed in a God who is your Friend.

Again, the peace of God is peace within ourselves. The unrest of human life comes largely from our being torn asunder by contending impulses. Conscience pulls this way, passion that. Desire says, "Do this"; reason, judgment, prudence say, "It is at your peril if you do!" One desire fights against another. And so the man is rent asunder. There must be the harmonising of all the being if there is to be real rest of spirit. No longer must it be like the chaos ere the creative word was spoken, where, in gloom, contending elements strove.

Again, men have not peace, because in most of them everything is topmost that ought to be undermost, and everything undermost that ought to be uppermost. "Beggars are on horseback" (and we know where they ride), "and princes walking." The more regal part of the man's nature is suppressed, and trodden under foot; and the servile arts, which ought to be under firm restraint, and guided by a wise hand, are too often supreme, and wild work comes of that. When you put the captain and the officers, and everybody on board that knows anything about navigation, into irons, and fasten down the hatches on them, and let the crew and the cabin-boys take the helm and direct the ship, it is not likely that the voyage will end anywhere but on the rocks. Multitudes are living lives of

unrestfulness, simply because they have set the lowest parts of their nature upon the throne, and subordinated the highest.

Our unrest comes from yet another source. You have not peace, because you have not found and grasped the true objects for any of your faculties. God is the only possession that brings quiet. The heart hungers until it feeds upon Him. The mind is satisfied with no truth until behind truth it finds a person who is true. The will is enslaved and wretched until in God it recognises legitimate and absolute authority which it is blessing to obey. Love puts out its yearnings, like the filaments that gossamer spiders send out into the air, seeking in vain for something to fasten upon, until it touches God, and clings there. There is no rest for a man until he rests in God. The reason why this world is so full of excitement is because it is so empty of peace, and the reason why it is so empty of peace is because it is so void of God. The peace of God brings peace with Him, and peace within. It "unites our hearts to fear His name," and draws all the else turbulent and confusedly flowing impulses of the great deep of the spirit after itself, in a tidal wave, as the moon the waters of the gathered ocean. The peace of God is peace with Him, and peace within.

I need not, I suppose, do more than say one word about that descriptive clause in my text, "It passeth understanding." The understanding is not the hand by which men lay hold of the peace of God any more than you can see a picture with your ears or hear music with your eyes. To everything its

own organ: you cannot weigh truth in a tradesman's scales or measure thought with a yard-stick. Love is not the organ for apprehending Euclid, nor the brain the organ for grasping these Divine and spiritual gifts. The peace of God transcends the understanding, as well as belongs to another order of things than that about which the understanding is concerned. You must experience it to know it; you must have it in order that you may feel its sweetness. It eludes the grasp of the loveliest, though it yields itself to the clutch of the patient and loving heart.

II.—So notice, in the next place, what my text tells us about what the peace of God does.

"It shall keep your hearts and minds." The Apostle here blends together, in a very remarkable manner, the conceptions of peace and of war, for he employs a purely military word to express the office of this Divine peace. That word, "shall keep," is the same as is translated in another of his letters *kept with a garrison*—and, though, perhaps, it might be going too far to insist that the military idea is prominent in his mind, it will certainly not be unsafe to recognize its presence.

So, then, this Divine peace takes upon itself warlike functions, and garrisons the heart and mind. What does he mean by "the heart and mind"? Not, as the English reader might suppose, two different faculties, the emotional and the intellectual– which is what we usually roughly mean by our distinction between heart and mind—but, as is always the case in the Bible, the "heart" means the whole inner man, whether considered as think-

ing, willing, purposing, or doing any other inward act; and the word rendered "mind" does not mean another part of human nature, but the whole products of the operations of the heart. The Revised Version renders it by "thoughts," and that is correct if it be given a wide enough application, so as to include emotions, affections, purposes, as well as "thoughts" in the narrower sense. The whole inner man, in all the extent of its manifold operations, that indwelling peace of God will garrison and guard.

So note, however profound and real that Divine peace is, it is to be enjoyed in the midst of warfare. Quiet is not quiescence. God's peace is not torpor. The man that has it has still to wage continual conflict, and day by day to brace himself anew for the fight. The highest energy of action is the result of the deepest calm of heart; just as the motion of this solid, and, as we feel it to be, immovable world, is far more rapid through the abysses of space, and on its own axis, than any of the motions of the things on its surface. So the quiet heart "which moveth altogether if it move at all," rests whilst it moves, and moves the more swiftly because of its unbroken repose. That peace of God, which is peace militant, is unbroken amidst the conflicts. The wise old Greeks chose for the Goddess of Athens the goddess of Wisdom, and whilst they consecrated to her the olive branch, which is the symbol of peace, they set her image on the Parthenon, helmed and spear-bearing, to defend the peace which she brought to earth. So this heavenly virgin, whom the Apostle personifies here, is the "wingéd sentry,

all skilful in the wars," who enters into our hearts and fights for us to keep us in unbroken peace.

It is possible day by day to go out to toil and care and anxiety and change and suffering and conflict, and yet to bear within our hearts the unalterable rest of God. Deep in the bosom of the ocean, beneath the region where winds howl and billows break, there is calm, but the calm is not stagnation. Each drop from these fathomless abysses may be raised to the surface by the power of the sunbeams, expanded there by their heat and sent on some beneficent message across the world. So, deep in our hearts, beneath the storm, beneath the raving winds and the curling waves, there may be a central repose, as unlike stagnation as it is unlike tumult; and the peace of God may keep, as a warrior, our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

What is the plain English of that metaphor? Just this, that a man who has that peace as his conscious possession is lifted above the temptations that otherwise would drag him away. The full cup, filled with precious wine, has no room in it for the poison that otherwise might be poured in. As Jesus Christ has taught us, there is such a thing as cleansing a heart in some measure, and yet because it is "empty," though it is "swept and garnished," the demons come back again. The best way to be made strong to resist temptation is to be lifted above feeling it to be a temptation by reason of the sweetness of the peace possessed. Oh! if our hearts were filled, as they might be filled, with that Divine repose, do you think that the

vulgar, coarse-tasting baits which make our mouths water now would have any power over us? Will a man who bears in his hands jewels of priceless value, and knows them to be such, find much temptation when some bit of imitation stuff, made of coloured glass and a tinfoil backing, is presented to him? Will the world draw us away if we are rooted and grounded in the peace of God? Geologists tell us that climates are changed and creatures are killed by the slow variation of level in the earth. If you and I can only heave our lives up high enough, the foul things that live down below will find the air too pure and keen for them, and will die and disappear; and all the vermin that stung and nestled down in the flats will be gone when we get up to the heights. The peace of God will keep hearts and their thoughts.

III.—Now, lastly, notice how we get the peace of God.

My text is an exuberant promise, but it is knit on to something before by that "and" at the beginning of the verse. It is a promise, as all God's promises are, on conditions. And here are the conditions. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." That defines the conditions in part; and the last words of the text itself complete the definition. "In Christ Jesus" describes, not so much where we are to be kept, as a condition under which we shall be. How, then, can I get this peace into my turbulent, changeful life?

I answer, first, trust is peace. It is always so;

even when it is misplaced we are at rest. The condition of repose for the human heart is that we shall be "in Christ," who has said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace." And how may I be "in Him"? Simply by trusting myself to Him. That brings peace with God.

The sinless Son of God has died on the Cross, a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world—for yours and for mine. Let us trust to that and we shall have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And "in Him" we have, by trust, inward peace, for He, through our faith, controls our whole natures, and faith leads the lion in a silken leash, like Spenser's Una.

Trust in Christ brings peace amid outward sorrows and conflicts. When the pilot comes on board the captain does not leave the bridge, but stands by the pilot's side. His responsibility is past, but his duties are not over. And when Christ comes into my heart, my effort, my judgment, are not made unnecessary or put on one side. Let Him take the command, and stand beside Him, and carry out His orders, and you will find rest to your souls.

Again, submission is peace. What makes our troubles is not outward circumstances, howsoever afflictive they may be, but the resistance of our spirits to the circumstances. And where a man's will bends and says, "Not mine, but Thine, be done," there is calm. Submission is like the lotion that you apply to the mosquito bites—it takes away the irritation, though the puncture be left. Submission is peace, both as resignation and as obedience.

Communion is peace. You will get no quiet until you live with God. Until He is at your side, you will always be moved.

So, dear friends, do you fix this in your minds: a life without Christ is a life without peace. Without Him you may have excitement, pleasure, gratified passions, success, accomplished hopes, but peace never! You never have had it, have you? If you live without Him, you may forget that you have not Him, and you can plunge into the world, and so lose the consciousness of the aching void, but it is there all the same. You never will have peace until you go to Him. There is only one way to get it. The Christless heart is like the troubled sea that cannot rest. There is no peace for it. But in Him you can get it for the asking. "The chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him." For our sakes He died on the Cross, so making peace. Trust Him as your only hope, Saviour, friend, and the God of peace will "fill you with all joy and peace in believing." Then bow your wills to Him in acceptance of His providence and in obedience to His commands, and so, "your peace shall be as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea." Then keep your hearts in union and communion with Him, and so His presence will keep you in perfect peace whilst conflicts last, and, with Him at your side, you will pass through the valley of the shadow of death undisturbed, and come to the true Salem, the city of peace, where they beat their swords into ploughshares, and learn and fear war no more.

XII.

The Vision of God and the Feast before Him.

"They saw God and did eat and drink."—EXODUS xxiv. 11.

HESE are strangely bold words, both for the assertion with which they begin, and for the juxtaposition of the two things which they declare. They come at the close of the solemn ceremonial by which God and Israel entered into covenant. Lightly-uttered vows of obedience to all that God could speak had echoed among the rocks. On the basis of that promise a covenant was formed and ratified by sacrifice. A rude altar was piled, round it were set twelve standing stones—the representatives of the tribes—the whole group being a symbol of Israel gathered round its God. The sacrifices were offered, half of the blood is cast upon the altar, the witness that man enters into amity with God through sacrifice. Half of the blood is sprinkled upon the people, the witness that the blood of the sacrifice cleanses and consecrates the men that accept it. And then a chosen body of seventy representatives of the

nation, accompanying the Lawgiver and the future high priest, ascend the mountain. They pass within the fence, the witness that access to God is possible on the footing of Covenant and Sacrifice. They behold, as I suppose, unclouded, the material and fiery symbol of His presence; witness that men through Sacrifice and Covenant can see God.

But our eyes are stayed on the pavement beneath His feet. No form is described. Enough for us that there is spread beneath Him that which is blue and gleaming as the cloudless Heaven above Sinai. "They eat and drink"—witness that men who draw nigh to God, on the footing of sacrifice and covenant, and thereby behold His face, have therein festal abundance for all their need. So this incident, in its form adapted to the infantile development of the people that first received it, carries in its symbols the deepest truths of the best communion of the Christian life, and may lend itself to the foreshadowing of the unspoken glories of the heavens.

I.—I ask you to consider, first, the vision of God possible for us.

The Bible says two things about that. It asserts, and it denies with equal emphasis, the possibility of our seeing Him. The two things are, of course, easily capable of reconciliation; the sight which is affirmed is not the sight which is denied. That vision which is impossible is the literal vision by sense, or, in a secondary meaning, the full, adequate, direct knowledge of God. The vision which is affirmed is the knowledge of Him, clear, certain, vivid, and, as I believe, yielding nothing

to sense in any of these respects. The God whom we cannot see, either in the sense of perceiving with the eye, or of grasping and apprehending with mind and spirit, is the boundless infinitude of the Divine nature. The God whom we can see is that aspect of that infinite nature which is turned to us, which the Scripture calls "the face of God." The vision of God of which the text speaks appears to have been an actual visible appearance, probably of that "symbolical fire" which shone on Sinai, and was seen by the people veiled in cloud and smoke, but by the seventy in unveiled brightness. The author of Exodus knew as well as any modern objector, that no man can see God's face," and declares that these men "saw the God of Israel," not because its conceptions of Him are gross and material, but because the invisible God deigned to assume a form of visible brightness in order to certify His presence and friendship. That this is "supernatural" we admit; that it is "gross" or "puerile" we deny.

Now what lessons does this vision bring for us? I am not going to plunge into questions out of place in the pulpit about the nature and certitude of man's knowledge of God. Our business is with revealed truth, and this is the truth for us, that we Christians may, even here and now, see God, the God of the covenant.

Jesus Christ is the Revealer. This generation is very fond of saying, "No man hath seen God at any time, nor can see Him." It is a pity that they do not go on with the quotation and say, "the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father,

He hath declared Him." The eradiation of His brightness, "and the express image of His person," is that Divine man, God manifest in the flesh. The knowledge of God which we have in Jesus Christ is real, as sight is real. It is not complete, but it is genuine knowledge. We know the best of God, if I may use such a phrase, when we know what we know in Christ, that He is a loving and a righteous will; when we can say of Him "He is love," in no metaphor but in simple reality, and His will is a will towards all righteousness, and towards all blessing, anything that heaven has to teach us about God afterwards is less than that. We see Him in the reality of a genuine, central, though by no means complete, knowledge.

Our knowlege of God in Christ is as sight, in reference to certitude. People say "seeing is believing." I should turn it the other way about, and say "believing is seeing." For we may be a great deal surer of God than ever we can be of this outer world. And the witness which is borne to us in Christ of the Divine nature is far more reliable than even the evidence that is borne to us by sense of an external universe. We all know how possible it is that sense may be deceived. I suppose we all believe that our consciousness and our intuitions are more certain than the evidence of our senses. And I venture to affirm that in certitude the facts about God which are laid down at all our doors in the person and work of Jesus Christ compare not unfavourably with the evidence of sense.

The knowledge that we have of God in Christ is as vision, or it may be so in reference to its vividness as well as its reality and its certitude. That depends upon ourselves, as I shall have to show you in a moment. But it is possible for men to live so thoroughly, closely, realizing God and His presence, that the things roundabout are seen to be shadowy and phantasmal, and He, the Unseen Reality blazing behind them all. Sight is busy, intrusive, self-asserting; but we may have, and ought to have, a vividness of impression of the Divine love and the Divine presence which make all that bodily sight can show to us dim and far off. Christ, the revealer of God, makes God visible to us. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Remember, too, that when we learn to know, and absolutely to rely upon, and vividly to realize our Father's presence through Jesus Christ, then we shall see Him in all things and everywhere. The world is full of confused and fragmentary witnesses to Him which may be diversely interpreted according to men's dispositions; but when we have reached the higher knowledge the lower sources of knowledge become vocal with a deeper music and significant with a better meaning; and a world, which is chaos to a man that has not learned God in Christ, is all order and witnesses of the Father to the man that has.

So it is possible for us, like those Israelites in the wilderness, to see uncreated brightness blazing upon the barren rocks; possible for us to see that everything in life is aflame with a present God; possible for us to have all events, persons, objects

transparent, and revealing the Father of us all.

People are desperately afraid of what they call, without quite knowing what they mean by it, Pantheism. Christian Pantheism asserts that God is separable from, and independent of, the material universe; but also asserts that the material universe is neither separable from, nor independent of, the upholding and indwelling God. And they who in all material things see the presence and the play of the Divine will, have come to understand the secret of the universe. God moves everywhere. There is no power but of God. And they who have learned to see Him in Christ see Him everywhere.

Then remember, further, that the degree of this vision depends upon ourselves, and is a matter of cultivation. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." There are three things wanted for sight — something to see; something to see by; something to see with. God has given us the two first, and He will help us to the last if we like. But we have to bring the eye, without which the sunbeam is vain, and that which it reveals is also vain. Christ stands before us, at once the Master-Light of all our seeing, and the Object that we are to behold. But for us there is needed that the eye shall be pure; that the heart shall turn towards Him. Faith is the eye of the soul. Meditation and habitual occupation of mind and heart with Jesus Christ, the Revealer of God, are needed if we are to "see God." There are things that cannot be seen at a glance, and this is one of them.

Faith, meditation, purity, these three are the purging of our vision, and the conditions in us of the sight of God.

So, Christian men and women, here is a question for you. Do you know God anything like as really, as certainly, as vividly as you know and see the things that are round about you? Are your eyes darkened that you cannot see, because you have gazed so long and so lovingly on the trifles of life that you cannot focus them to behold the far-off and the infinitely superior glory of God?

The seventy that climbed the mount proclaim a privilege and prescribe a duty. And if we profess to have entered into covenant with God on the footing of sacrifice, and to have made the acquaintance of Christ who reveals God, oh! it is a shame and a sin that we should see Him so dimly, far-off, through mists, and that any trivial object close to our eyes should be big enough to shut Him out and bright enough to dazzle them. "They saw God" points to obligation as well as prerogative.

II.—Secondly, notice the feast in the Divine presence.

"They did eat and drink." That suggests in the singular juxtaposition of the two things, that the vision of God is consistent with, and consecrates, common enjoyment and everyday life. Even before that awful blaze these men sat down and fed, "eating their meal with gladness and singleness of heart," and finding no contradiction nor any profanity in the close juxtaposition of the meal and the vision. There is no false asceticism

as the result of the Christian sight of God. It takes nothing out of life that ought to be in it. If we see God there is only one thing that we shall be ashamed to do in His presence, and that is to sin. For all the rest, the vision of God blends sweetly and lovingly with common service and homely joys. It will interpret life. Nothing is small with such a background; nothing common-place when looked at in connection with Him. It will ennoble life. It will gladden life. The dustiest, dreariest, loneliest road becomes less lonely, dreary, and dusty when he that travels it can say, "I walk in the light of His countenance"; and all sad things are less sad when we link them with a present God. It will consecrate life. Like the fabled Venetian glass, which shivered into pieces when poison was poured into it, the thought of God's presence, the loving vision of His face, passes out of our hearts when we yield ourselves to sin. And the test of evil is, "Dare I do it before the flashing Shekinah on the mountain top?" The feast that is spread in the presence of the Lord is a feast of pure dainties and of unintoxicating wines.

But there is another thought here, to which I must refer for a moment. That strange meal on the mountain was no doubt made on the sacrifices that had preceded, of which a part were peace-offerings. The ritual of that species of sacrifice partly consisted in a portion of the sacrifice being partaken of by the offerers. The same meaning lies in this meal on the mountain that lay in the sacrificial feast of the peace-offering, the same meaning that lies in the great feast of the new

Covenant, "This is My body; this is My blood." They who are in fellowship with God, on the footing of covenant and sacrifice, and are gladdened by the vision of His loving face, are nourished and sustained by the sacrifice through which they come near. The Christ that died for us must be the Christ on whom mind and heart and will and memory and hope, and all our nature, feed, and by whom they are nourished. God spreads in His presence a table, and the food on that table is the "Bread which came down from Heaven that it might give life to the world." The vision of God and the feast on the mountain are equally provided and made possible by Christ our Passover, who was sacrificed for us.

III.—And so, lastly, we may gather out of this incident a glimpse of a prophetic character, and see in it the perfecting of the vision and of the feast.

We recall the Apostle's wonderful statement of the difference between the beatific knowledge of heaven and the indirect and partial knowledge of earth. Here we "see in a glass darkly; there face to face." It is not for us to try before the time to interpret the latter of these statements; only this, let us remember that, whatever may be the change in manner of knowledge, and in measure of apprehension, and in proximity of presence, there is no change in heaven, in the medium of revelation. For heaven, as for earth, God is the King invisible; for heaven, as for earth, no man can see Him: the only begotten Son declares Him. Christ is for ever the Manifester of God, and the glorified saints

see God as we see Him in the face of Jesus Christ, though they see that face as we do not. Yonder there are new capacities indeed. Where there are more windows in the house, there will be more sunshine in the rooms. When there is a new speculum in the telescope, galaxies will be resolved that are now nebulous, and new brightnesses will be visible that are now veiled. But with all the new powers and the extension of present vision, there will be no corrections in the present vision. We know the best of God, as I have said already. Certainly, the divinest thing in God, if I may so say, is His love, and it is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Much will drop away, forms of thought will disappear, inadequate conceptions will crumble; we shall put away childish things. There will be progress, but no corrections, in the revelation of God that Christ has made. We shall see Him as He is, and learn that what we knew of Him in Christ here is true for ever. And on that perfect vision will follow the perfect meal, which will still be the feeding on the sacrifice. For there were no heaven except "He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever," and there is no spiritual life above except a life derived from Him.

The feast means perfect satisfaction, perfect repose, perfect gladness, perfect companionship, It is possible for us to sit here as the guests at the lower table, looking up the hall and seeing our Host from afar; and then to be bade to go up higher, and seat ourselves closer to the Lord of the feast. And then we shall say, "They shall be satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou

makest them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. In Thy light shall we see light."

Whether is that life, dear friend, better, or the life which sees God at intervals through mists that make His face lurid and hostile; and is, therefore, a life of hunger and unrest, ending at last in banishment from the banqueting hall and abandonment to the outer darkness?

Christ shows us God and spreads the table for earth and for heaven.

XIII.

What comes of a Dead Christ.

"And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God."—1 Cor. xv. 14, 15.

E do not prove that an event has happened by showing the advantages of believing that it has. And so the statement of consequences of the denial of the Resurrection in this context is not intended as proof of the reality of the Resurrection. Paul has established that in the previous part of the chapter by the only legitimate evidence—viz., the testimony of eye-witnesses. Here he deals with the results that would follow from the denial of a Resurrection in order to show, not that it has verily taken place, but that the belief of it is fundamental to all real Christian belief.

The peculiar form of heresy against which the Apostle is arguing—viz., the denial of a general resurrection of the dead, accompanied with an acceptance of Christ's Resurrection, does not concern us now. Nor are we concerned with the place in his argument which this enumeration of

the destructive effects of the denial of Christ's rising again, holds. I confine myself to the consideration of that list of consequences. If we invert them we gather the blessed results of the faith in a Resurrection. I deal, not only with the clauses which I have read, but with the others which belong to the same subject in the adjoining verses.

I.—The first point the Apostle makes is this: that with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ the whole Gospel stands or falls.

"If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain." Now that does not mean, as a mere English reader might take it to mean, "it is useless for us to preach." "Preaching" here means, not the act, but the subject-matter of the message, and "vain" means, not *idle*, but *empty*. Paul thinks that unless Jesus Christ be risen the Gospel is emptied of its contents. Its life-blood is drained out of it. As we say colloquially, there is nothing in it. It is an empty shell. A dead Christ makes a hollow Gospel; a living Christ makes a full one.

Let us just illustrate that for a few moments. If the Resurrection goes the supernatural goes; if the Resurrection remains the door is opened for the miraculous. We hear all round about us to-day, in all sorts of voices, the declaration that all miracle is impossible. There is one fact that stands on its own appropriate evidence, evidence which I venture to say is irrefragable—viz., the historical fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which shatters all such contention. That fact is the key of the position. Like some great fortress

standing at the mouth of the pass into the fertile country, as long as it holds out, the storm of war is rolled back in broken foam from its firm battlements; if it yields all is surrendered. Round the alleged fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ turns this whole controversy; and more and more it will be manifest that any theory of the relations between God and man, which is not able to find a place for the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is unable to hold the field. All sorts of preposterous theories to account for the belief in it upon natural grounds spring up, generation after generation, and generation after generation are swept away into the dust-bin of forgotten absurdities, and the old message stands, "Jesus Christ is risen from the dead." If that be the truth, there is a gap in the iron wall of natural sequence that rings round men's lives, wide enough for all supernatural communications from the loving Father of us all to enter in. This is the test question, Do you believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Again, if the Resurrection of Christ goes, all the peculiarity of His nature goes with it. He said, as I believe, that He was the Son of God. His life is full of claims to a unique position. When He was laid in the new rock tomb, and the stars shone down upon it that night, was He laid there for ever, and is He there still? If so, there is no use in mincing the matter, Jesus Christ's talk about Himself was false; and Jesus Christ's claims to be a reliable religious teacher are subject to the tremendous deduction that, with all the beauty of

much that He said, and the sweetness and humbleness of His life, He advanced claims which the fact of His dying the death of all men, and lying in the tomb, has pulverised and absolutely destroyed. But if it be true that He has risen from the dead, then we say with Paul, "declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead." And in that mighty act which befel, as in the breaking dawn of this day, we hear the last and the clearest of God's utterances of approval, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Again, with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ stands or falls the special character and efficacy of His death. If He has been laid in the tomb, and has not burst its bonds, then it is idle to talk of anything in the nature of expiation or sacrifice for sin in that death which He died; but, if it be true that He indeed has come forth from the grave, then we have the great Divine attestation to the efficacy of His sacrifice, and the acceptableness of His expiation, and can rejoice that, the Victim having come forth from the darkness of death, that which He died to effect has been effected, and our sins are passed away.

If, on the other hand, there be no Resurrection, then there is no sacrifice, and if no sacrifice, then there is no pardon, and the very heart of the Gospel has disappeared, and Christ falls back into the crowd, and there is nothing in Him that there is not in the rest of us.

So, if all these things go—the miraculous, the Divinity of our Lord, the sacrificial nature of His death—if these things go, what is left is not

Christianity. Paul says: "If Christ be not risen, our preaching"—the thing that I preach—is emptied of all its contents; it is not worth preaching. What, then, was his conception of the Gospel? Suppose there were no Resurrection, what is left? All that a great many think makes Christianity. Its removal does not touch the beauty of Christ's words. It does not, in the slightest degree, affect the loveliness of His character; it does not at all, except inferentially, affect His position as our Pattern and the very ideal and summit of the human nature. "Yet," says Paul, "if that is all I have to preach, I have nothing but an empty shell to preach." He thought that the things which went with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ were all the things that made Christianity. If you took it away, you struck out the centre pole of the tent, and all the rest came down in a huddle of wet canvas, below which no man could live. "If Christ be not risen, our preaching is vain."

II.—Secondly, with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ stands or falls the character of the witnesses.

The Apostle, in his down-right fashion, puts his finger upon the real state of the case when he says, "This is the question: Are we, these eleven men and I, John, Peter, and all the rest of us, are we liars or are we not?" He points out, too, the palpable improbability, when he says that if so, they are "false witnesses of God"—men believing themselves to be servants of Him who is the God of truth and purity, and thinking to advance His

Kingdom by telling a monstrous falsehood. There have been priests, plenty, that have not felt any inconsistency in such a position, and have been orthodox liars for God. But it is impossible to suppose that that was the character of these Apostles. Enthusiasm never lives with falsehood, nor does self-sacrifice. No conscious liar can preach a lofty morality. These men were self-sacrificing enthusiasts who had devoted their lives to the promulgation of the loftiest morality. Is it credible that flowers of that sort grow in the rotten swamp of unveracity? Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? The hypothesis that the early Christian witnesses to the Resurrection were deliberate falsifiers of fact will not hold water.

And by the acknowledgment of the disbelievers of the Resurrection to-day it does not hold water, for the vulgar old theory has been long abandoned, and nobody now ventures to say that they were false witnesses. Oh, no! The men that least accept their testimony are those who abound in compliments to their moral elevation, to the purity and beauty of their religious character, to the "genius" of Paul, to the large wisdom that marks many of his words. I can fancy how he would have looked at some of these modern teachers, who kiss first and then deny. He would have said to them: "I do not want your compliments. I am not here as a great religious thinker; my business is to tell a plain story. Do you believe me, or do you not?"

And that really is the issue to which we have to

come. For no attempt to save the character of the first preachers, and to give up the historical fact, has ever been able to stand its ground, or ever will. They talk about illusions. Strange illusions that sprung up in a soil that had nothing in it to prepare for them! There was no expectation which might have become parent of the belief. They tell us that the desire was father of the thought. I wonder if people that try to explain the Resurrection on the ground that longing to see Him again made the Apostles fancy that they had seen Him again, ever yearned

> For the touch of a vanished hand,
> Or the sound of a voice that is still.

I think if they had, they would have looked for some other explanation. Illusions shared by 500 people at once! They fancied they saw Him amongst them; they fancied they saw Him eat and drink; they fancied they heard Him speak; they fancied that they heard Him say, "I go into Galilee"; they fancied they met Him there; they fancied they saw Him go up into heaven! Surely, such an explanation, by the very desperation of the shifts to which it is reduced, bears involuntary witness that the Resurrection is an historical fact, resting upon evidence with which it is vain to struggle. We are shut up to the alternative—either Jesus Christ is risen again from the dead, or these noble lives of enthusiasm, faith, self-sacrifice, and lofty morality, are the spawn of a lie. "Yea! we are found false witnesses of God."

III.—Again, with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ stands or falls the faith of the Christian.

Twice in this context does the Apostle use the expression, according to our Authorised Version, "Your faith is vain." But the two words rendered "vain" are not the same. The first of them is that employed also in the previous clause, "Then is our preaching vain," and in both cases it means "empty." The second, in the 17th verse, is a different word, and means vain in the sense of *having no effect.*

So notice, first, a dead Christ makes an empty faith. There is nothing for faith to lay hold of. It is like a drowning man grasping a rope's end swinging over the side of the ship, which is loose at the other end and gives; or like some poor creature falling down the face of a precipice, and clutching at a tuft of grass, which comes away in his hand. A dead Christ is no object for faith. He may be for admiration or imitation; but for faith—No! You want a living Lord for that, "a Christ that died, yea! rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God." Faith is empty of contents unless it grasps the risen Lord; and if it lays hold of Him it is solid and full.

Again, a dead Christ makes a powerless faith. The Apostle proceeds to give one illustration of its powerlessness. Unless we believe in a risen Saviour we have no deliverance from our sin, either as a ground of condemnation or as a power over our lives. A religion which does not bring conscious deliverance from sin, both as guilt and as tendency,

is not worth calling a religion. If our faith has not set us free from condemnation, and from the love and service of evil, it is not worth calling faith. How much vain faith, then, there must be going up and down the world, if all faith which leaves men "in their sins" is to be gibbeted as "vain"! What about yours? Does it take you clean out of the region of sin and death, and lift you right into the region of righteousness and life? In Paul's judgment no religion will deliver a man from the condemnation and the power of evil, except a religion which grasps the fact of the risen Christ. That is so, because, as we have seen, unless for the Resurrection, we have no ground of belief in the expiation and sacrifice of the Cross. And if we have not that, we have nothing that assures to us the cleansing of our sins.

And it is so for another reason—because, unless we have a faith in a Christ that lives to help and quicken and purify us, we shall never really be delivered from the dominion of our sins, nor live a life of purity and of righteousness. So, both because the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the key to the power of the death of Christ, and because it is the beginning of the continuous life of Jesus Christ with us, in us, and for us, our faith has no operation in delivering us from the burden and chain of evil, unless it grasps a Cross, an empty sepulchre, and a filled Throne. "If Christ be not risen your faith is vain."

IV.—And, lastly, with the Resurrection of Christ stands or falls the Heaven of His servants.

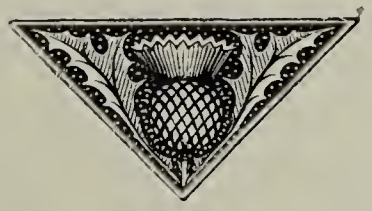
That is set before us in the context in two forms: "Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." A dead Christ means dead Christians. All the saints that have gone, as they thought, with "singing and with everlasting joy upon their heads," into the presence of the living Lord, have gone out of life with a lie in their right hand, and have lain down in the dust, there to remain for evermore. The dark curtain falls. There is one thing that makes immortality certain —the fact of Christ's Resurrection. There is but one thing that makes the believer's eternal life sure—the eternal life of his Lord. A living Head means living members; a dead Head means members dead and corrupt. So, for ourselves, for all our dear ones, for all the generations that have trod the common road into the great darkness, there is the one hope—a risen Christ. "I am the Resurrection and the Life." "Because I live, ye shall live also."

And, again, another form of this thought is, a dead Christ makes deluded Christians, "for if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Now, that "only" does not merely apply to the words that precede it in our translation, but to the whole clause: "If in this life we have hope in Christ, and if that is all, we are of all men the most to be pitied." So says Paul, and then people say, "What a low notion that is! Would it not be better to be a Christian than not, if there were no future life? Did not the Stoic philosophers, who said, 'Virtue is its own reward,' reach a higher elevation than this Apostle

who said, If there is no future life for Christians, then they are most to be pitied of all men?" I do not think so. Notice, he does not say they are most to be pitied, because of any sorrows or trouble that they have had here, although that is the ordinary explanation of the words. They are the most to be pitied because the nobler the hope, the more tragic its disappointment. And of all the tragedies of life there would be none so great as this, that Christian men cherishing such aspirations, with such high, buoyant, jubilant confidence in a great eternity, should all the while have been clutching a phantom, grasping mists, "filling their belly with the east wind," as the Old Testament says. If we, journeying across the desert, are only cheated by *mirage*, when we think we see the shining battlements of the Eternal City, which are nothing but hot air dancing in empty space, surely none are more to be pitied than we. On the other hand, a living Christ turns these hopes into certainties, and makes us, not the most pitiable, but the most blessed and felicitous of the sons of men; for they are happy, whatever their outward fate, who live, entertaining a pure hope, and who die into its fulfilment. And this is the lot of the Christian man.

So, brethren, this Gospel, that Christ died for our sins, and was raised again the third day, is the Gospel that is worth preaching. That is the Gospel that makes our faith solid. That is the Gospel that gives us deliverance from our sins. That is the Gospel that makes it possible for us to think thankfully, peacefully, sometimes even joy-

fully of those that sleep in Jesus. That is the Gospel which will make us, whilst we live, blessed in hope, and when we die thrice blessed in fruition. Do you see to it that it is the Gospel which you believe, by which also you stand. And take for your own that great shout of triumph with which our Apostle turns away from the ghastly picture of what would come of a dead Christ. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that sleep."



XIV.

Fences and Serpents.

"Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him."—ECCLES. x. 8.

WHAT is meant here is, probably, not such a hedge as we are accustomed to see, but a dry stone wall, or, perhaps, an earthen embankment, in the crevices of which might lurk a snake, to sting the careless hand. The connection and purpose of the text are somewhat obscure. It is one of a string of proverb-like sayings which all seem to be illustrations of the one thought that every kind of work has its own appropriate and peculiar peril. So, says the preacher, if a man is digging a pit, the sides of it may cave in and he may go down. If he is pulling down a wall he may get stung. If he is working in a quarry there may be a fall of rock. If he is a woodman the tree he is felling may crush him. What then? Is the inference to be, sit still and do nothing, because you may get hurt whatever you do? By no means. The writer of this book hates idleness very nearly as much as he does what he calls "folly," and his inference is stated in the next verse—"Wisdom is profitable to direct." That is

to say, since all work has its own dangers, work warily, and with your brains as well as your muscles, and do not put your hand into the hollow in the wall, until you have looked to see whether there are any snakes in it. Is that very wholesome maxim of prudence all that is meant to be learnt? I think not. The previous clause, at all events, embodies a well-known metaphor of the Old Testament. "He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it" often occurs as expressing the retribution in kind that comes down on the cunning plotter against other men's prosperity, and the conclusion that wisdom suggests in that application of the sentence is, *not* "Dig judiciously," but "Do not dig at all." And so in my text the "wall" may stand for the limitations and boundary lines of our lives, and the inference that wisdom suggests in that application of the saying is not "Pull down judiciously," but "Keep the fence up, and be sure you keep on the right side of it." For any attempt to pull it down—which, being interpreted, is to transgress the laws of life which God has enjoined—is sure to bring out the hissing snake with its poison.

Now it is in that respect that I want to look at the words before us.

I.—First of all, let us take that thought which underlies my text—that all life is given us, rigidly walled up.

The first thing that the child learns is, that it must not do what it likes. The last lesson that the old man has to learn is, You must do what you ought. And between these two extremes of life

we are always making attempts to treat the world as an open common, on which we may wander at our will. And before we have gone many steps, some sort of keeper or other meets us and says to us, "Trespassers! back again to the road!" Life is rigidly hedged in and limited. To live as you like is the prerogative of a brute. To live as you ought, and to recognise and command by obeying the laws and limitations stamped upon our very nature and enjoined by our circumstances, is the freedom and the glory of a man. There are limitations, I say, fences on all sides. Men put up their fences; and they are often like the wretched wooden hoardings that you sometimes see limiting the breadth of a road. But in regard to these conventional limitations and regulations, which own no higher authority or lawgiver than society and custom, you must make up your mind even more certainly than in regard of loftier laws, that if you meddle with them, there will be plenty of serpents coming out to hiss and bite. No man that defies the narrow maxims and petty restrictions of conventional ways, and sets at nought the opinions of the people round about him, but must make up his mind for backbiting and slander and opposition of all sorts. It is the price that we pay for obeying at first hand the laws of God and caring nothing for the conventionalities of man.

But apart from that altogether, let me just remind you, in half-a-dozen sentences, of the various limitations or fences which hedge up our lives on every side. There are the obligations which we owe, and the relations in which we

stand, to the outer world, the laws of physical life, and all that touches the external and the material. There are the relations in which we stand, and the obligations which we owe to ourselves. And God has so made us as that obviously large tracks of every man's nature are given to him on purpose to be restrained, curbed, coerced, and sometimes utterly crushed and extirpated. God gives us our impulses under lock and key. All our animal desires, all our natural tendencies, are held on condition that we exercise control over them, and keep them well within the rigidly marked limits which He has laid down, and which we can easily find out. There are, further, the relations in which we stand, and the obligations and limitations, therefore, under which we come, to the people round about us. High above them all, and in some sense including them all, but loftier than these, there is the all-comprehending relation in which we stand to God, who is the fountain of all obligations, the source and aim of all duty, who encompasses us on every side, and whose Will makes the boundary walls within which alone it is safe for a man to live.

We sometimes foolishly feel that a life thus hedged up, limited by these high boundaries on either side, must be uninteresting, monotonous, or unfree. It is not so. The walls are blessings, like the parapet on a mountain road, that keeps the travellers from toppling over the face of the cliff. They are training-walls, as our hydrographical engineers talk about, which, built in the bed of a river, wholesomely confine its waters and make a

good scour which gives life, instead of letting them vaguely wander and stagnate across great fields of mud. Freedom consists in keeping willingly within the limits which God has traced, and anything else is not freedom but licence and rebellion, and at bottom servitude of the most abject type.

II.—So, secondly, note that every attempt to break down the limitations brings poison into the life.

We live in a great automatic system which, by its own operation, largely avenges every breach of law. I need not remind you, except in a word, of the way in which the transgression of the plain physical laws stamped upon our constitutions avenges itself; but the certainty with which disease dogs all breaches of the laws of health is but a type in the lower and material universe of the far higher and more solemn certainty with which "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Wherever a man sets himself against any of the laws of this material universe, they make short work of him. We command them, as I said, by obeying them; and the difference between the obedience and the breach of them is the difference between the engineer standing on his engine and the wretch that is caught by it as it rushes over the rails. But that is but a parable of the higher thing which I want to speak to you about.

The grosser forms of transgression of the plain laws of temperance, abstinence, purity, bring with them, in like manner, a visible and palpable punishment in the majority of cases. Whoso pulls down

the wall of temperance, a serpent will bite him. Trembling hands, broken constitutions, ruined reputations, vanished ambitions, wasted lives, poverty, shame, and enfeebled will, death—these are the serpents that bite, in many cases, the transgressor. I have a man in my eye at this moment that used to sit in one of these pews, who came into Manchester a promising young man, a child of many prayers, with the ball at his feet in one of your great warehouses, the only hope of his house, professedly a Christian. He began to tamper with the wall. First, a tiny little bit of stone taken out that did not show the daylight through; then a little bigger and a bigger. And the serpent struck its fangs into him, and, if you saw him now, he is a shambling wreck, outside of society, and, as we sometimes tremblingly think, beyond hope. Young men! "Whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him."

In like manner there are other forms of "sins of the flesh" avenged in kind, which I dare not speak about more plainly here. I see many young men in my congregation, many strangers in this great city, living, I suppose, in lodgings, and therefore without many restraints. If you were to take a pair of compasses and place one leg of them down at the Free Trade Hall, and take a circle of half-a-mile round there, you would get a cavern of rattlesnakes. You know what I mean. Low theatres, low music-halls, casinos, haunts of yet viler sorts—there the snakes are, hissing and wreathing and ready to bite. Do not "put your hand on the hole of the asp." Take care of

books, pictures, songs, companions that would lead you astray. Oh! for a voice to stand at some doors that I know in Manchester, and peal this text into the ears of the fools, men and women, that go in there!

I heard only this week of one once in a good position in this city, and in early days, I believe, a member of my own congregation, begging in rags from door to door. And the reason was, simply, the wall had been pulled down and the serpent had struck. It always does; not with such fatal external effects always, but be ye sure of this: "God is not mocked; 'whatsoever a man,' or a woman either, 'soweth, that shall he also reap.'" For remember that there are other ways of pulling down walls than these gross and palpable transgressions with the body; and there are other sorts of retributions which come with unerring certainty besides those that can be taken notice of by others. I do not want to dwell upon these at any length, but let me just remind you of one or two of them.

Some serpents' bites inflame, some paralyse; and one or other of these two things—either an inflamed conscience or a palsied conscience—is the result of all wrong-doing. I do not know which is the worst. There are men and women now in this chapel, sitting listening to me, perhaps half interested, without the smallest suspicion that I am talking about them. The serpent's bite has led to the torpor of their consciences. Which is the worse—to loathe my sin and yet to find its

slimy coils round about me, so that I cannot break it, or to have got to like it and to be perfectly comfortable in it, and to have no remonstrance within when I do it? Be sure of this, that every transgression and disobedience acts immediately upon the conscience of the doer, sometimes to stir that conscience into agonies of gnawing remorse, more often to lull it into a fatal slumber.

I do not speak of the retributions which we heap upon ourselves in loading our memories with errors and faults, in polluting them often with vile imaginations, or in laying up there a life-long series of actions, none of which have ever had a trace of reference to God in them. I do not speak, except in a sentence, of the retribution which comes from the habit of evil which weights upon men, and makes it all but impossible for them ever to shake off their sin. I do not speak, except in a sentence, of the perverted relations to God, the incapacity of knowing Him, the disregard and even sometimes the dislike of the thought of Him which steal across the heart of the man that lives in evil and sin; but I put all into two words—every sin that I do tells upon myself, inasmuch as its virus passes into my blood as *guilt* and as *habit*. And then I remind you of what you say you believe, that beyond this world there lies the solemn judgment-seat of God, where you and I have to give account of our deeds. Oh! brother, be sure of this, "whoso breaketh a hedge"—here and now, and yonder also, "a serpent shall bite him."

That is as far as my text carries me. It has

nothing more to say. Am I to shut the Book and have done? There is only one system that has anything more to say, and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

III.—And so, passing from my text, I have to say, lastly, All the poison may be got out of your veins if you like.

Our Lord used this very same metaphor under a different aspect, and with a different historical application, when He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

There is Christ's idea of the condition of this world of ours—a camp of men lying bitten by serpents and drawing near to death. What I have been speaking about, in perhaps too abstract terms, is the condition of each one of us. It is hard to get people, when they are gathered by the hundred to listen to a sermon flung out in generalities, to realise it. If I could get you one by one, and "buttonhole" you; and instead of the plural "you" use the singular "thou" perhaps I could reach you. But let me ask you to try and realise each for yourselves that this serpent bite, as the issue of pulling down the wall, is true about each soul in this place to-night, and that Christ endorsed the representation. How are we to get this poison out of the blood? Reform your ways? Yes! I say that too; but reforming the life will deliver from the poison in the character, when you cure hydrophobia by washing the patient's skin, and not till then. It is all very well to repaper

your dining rooms, but it is very little good doing that if the drainage is wrong. It *is* the drainage that is wrong with us all. A man cannot reform himself down to the bottom of his sinful being. If he could, it does not touch the past. That remains the same. If he could, it does not affect his relation to God. Repentance—if it were possible apart from the softening influence of faith in Jesus Christ—repentance alone would not solve the problem. So far as men can see, and so far as all human systems have declared, "What I have written I have written." There is no erasing it. The irrevocable past stands stereotyped for ever. Then comes in this message of forgiveness and cleansing, which is the very heart of all that we preachers have to say, and has been spoken to most of you so often that it is almost impossible to invest it with any kind of freshness or power. But once more I have to preach to you that Christ has received into His own inmost life and self the whole gathered consequences of a world's sin; and by the mystery of His sympathy, and the reality of His mysterious union with us men, He, the sinless Son of God, has been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. The brazen serpent lifted on the pole was in the likeness of the serpent whose poison slew, but there was no poison in it. Christ has come, the sinless Son of God, for you and me. He has died on the Cross, the sacrifice for every man's sin, that every man's wound might be healed, and the poison cast out of his veins. He has bruised the malignant, black head of the snake, with His

wounded heel; and because He has been wounded, we are healed of our wounds. For sin and death launched their last dart at Him, and, like some venomous insect that can sting once and then must die, they left their sting in His wounded heart, and have none for them that put their trust in Him.

So, dear brother, here is the simple condition—namely, Faith. One look of the languid eye of the poisoned man, howsoever bloodshot and dim it might be, and howsoever nearly veiled with the film of death, was enough to make him whole. The look of our consciously sinful souls to that dear Christ that has died for us will take away the guilt, the power, the habit, the love of evil; and, instead of blood saturated with the venom of sin, there will be in our veins the spirit of life in Christ, which will make us free from the law of sin and death. "Look unto Him and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

XV.

Strength in Weakness.

"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."—2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

THIS very remarkable page in the autobiography of the Apostle shows us that he, too, belonged to the great army of martyrs who, with hearts bleeding and pierced through and through with a dart, yet did their work for God. It is of little consequence what his thorn in the flesh may have been. The original word suggests very much heavier sorrow than the metaphor of "a thorn" might imply. It really seems to mean, not a tiny bit of thorn that might lie half concealed in the finger tip, but one of those hideous stakes on which the cruel punishment of impalement used to be inflicted. And Paul's thought is, not that he has a little, trivial trouble

to bear, but that he is, as it were, forced quivering upon that tremendous torture.

Unquestionably, what he means is some bodily ailment or other. The hypothesis that the "thorn in the flesh" was the sting of the animal nature inciting him to evil is altogether untenable, because such a thorn could never have been left when the prayer for its removal was earnestly presented; nor could it ever have been, when left, an occasion for glorying. Manifestly it was no weakness removable by his own effort, no incapacity for service which in any manner approximated to being a fault, but purely and simply some infliction from God's hand (though likewise capable of being regarded as a "messenger of Satan"), which hindered him in his work, and took down any proud flesh and danger of spiritual exaltation in consequence of the largeness of his religious privileges.

Our text sets before us three most instructive windings, as it were, of the stream of thoughts that passed through the Apostle's mind, in reference to this burden that he had to carry, and may afford wholesome contemplation for us to-day. There is, first, the instinctive shrinking which took refuge in prayer. Then there is the insight won by prayer into the sustaining strength for, and the purposes of, the thorn that was not to be plucked out. And then, finally, there is the peace of acquiescence, and a will that accepts—not the inevitable, but the loving.

I.—First of all we get the instinctive shrinking from that which tortured the flesh, which takes refuge in prayer.

There is a wonderful, a beautiful, and, I suppose, an intentional parallel between the prayers of the servant and of the Master. Paul's petitions are the echo of Gethsemane. There, under the quivering olives, in the broken light of the Paschal moon, Jesus "thrice" prayed that the cup might pass from Him. And here the servant, emboldened and instructed by the example of the Master, "thrice" reiterates his human and natural desire for the removal of the pain, whatever it was, which seemed to him so to hinder the efficiency and the fulness, as it certainly did the joy, of his service.

But he that prayed in Gethsemane was He to whom Paul addressed his prayer. For, as is almost always the case in the New Testament, "the Lord" here evidently means Christ, as is obvious from the connection of the answer to the petition with the Apostle's final confidence and acquiescence. For the answer was: "My strength is made perfect in weakness"; and the Apostle's conclusion is: "Most gladly will I glorify in infirmity, that the" strength or "power *of Christ* may rest upon me." Therefore the prayer with which we have to deal here is a prayer offered to Jesus, who prayed in Gethsemane, and to whom we can bring our petitions and our desires.

Notice how this thought of prayer directed to the Master Himself helps to lead us deep into the sacredest and most blessed characteristics of prayer. It is only telling Christ what is in our hearts. Oh, if we lived in the true understanding of what prayer really is—the emptying

out of our inmost desire and thoughts before our Brother, who is likewise our Lord—questions as to what it was permissible to pray for, and what it was not permissible to pray for, would be irrelevant, and drop away of themselves. If we had a less formal notion of prayer, and realised more thoroughly what it was—the speech of a confiding heart to a sympathising Lord—then everything that fills our hearts would be seen to be a fitting object of prayer. If anything is large enough to interest me, it is not too small to be spoken about to Him.

So the question, which is often settled upon very abstract and deep grounds that have little to do with the matter—the question as to whether prayer for outward blessings is permissible—falls away of itself. If I am to talk to Jesus Christ about everything that concerns me, am I to keep my thumb upon all that great department and be silent about it? One reason why our prayers are often so unreal is, because they do not fit our real wants, nor correspond to the thoughts that are busy in our minds at the moment of praying. Our hearts are full of some small matter of daily interest, and when we kneel down not a word about it comes to our lips. Can that be right?

The difference between the different objects of prayer is not to be found in the rejection of all temporal and external, but in remembering that there are two sets of things to be prayed about, and over one set must ever be written, "If it be Thy will," and over the other it need not be written, because we are sure that the granting of our wishes,

is His will. We know about the one that "if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us." That may seem to be a very poor and shrunken kind of hope to give a man, that if his prayer is in conformity with the previous determination of the Divine will, it will be answered. But it availed for the joyful confidence of that Apostle who saw deepest into the conditions and the blessedness of the harmony of the will of God and of man. But about the other heap we can only say, "Not my will, but Thine be done." With that sentence, not as a formula upon our lips but deep in our hearts, let us take everything into His presence, thorns and stakes, pin-pricks and wounds out of which the life-blood is ebbing; let us take them all to Him, and be sure that we shall take none of them in vain.

So then we have the Person to whom the prayer is addressed, the subjects with which it is occupied, and the purpose to which it is directed. "Take away the burden" was the Apostle's petition; but it was a mistaken petition, and, therefore, unanswered.

II.—That brings me to the second of the windings, as I have ventured to call them, of this stream—viz., the insight into the source of strength for, and the purpose of, the thorn that could not be taken away. The Lord said unto me, "My grace is sufficient for thee. For My strength" (where the word "My" is a supplement, but a necessary one) "is made perfect in weakness."

The answer is, in form and in substance, a gentle refusal of the form of the petition, but it is more

than a granting of its essence. For the best answer to such a prayer, and the answer which a true man means when he says, "Take away the burden," need not be the external removal of the pressure of the sorrow, but the infusing of power to sustain it. There are two ways of lightening a burden, one is diminishing its actual weight, the other is increasing the strength of the shoulder that bears it. And the latter is God's way, is Christ's way, of dealing with us.

Now mark that the answer which this faithful prayer receives is no communication of anything fresh, but it is the opening of the man's eyes to see that already he has all that he needs. The reply is not, "I *will* give thee grace sufficient," but "My grace" (which thou hast now) "*is* sufficient for thee." That grace is given and possessed by the sorrowing heart at the moment when it prays. Open your eyes to see what you have, and you will not ask for the load to be taken away. Is not that always true? Many a heart is carrying some heavy weight; perhaps some have an incurable sorrow, some are stricken by disease that they know can never be healed, some are aware that the shipwreck has been total, and that the sorrow that they carry to-day will lie down with them in the dust. Be it so! "My grace (not shall be, but) *is* sufficient for thee." And what thou hast already in thy possession is enough for all that comes storming against thee of disease, disappointment, loss and misery. Set on the one side all possible as well as all actual weaknesses, burdens, pains, and set on the other these two words—"My

grace," and all these dwindle into nothingness and disappear. If troubled Christian men would learn what they have, and would use what they already possess, they would less often beseech Him with vain petitions to take away their blessings which are in the thorns in the flesh. "My grace is sufficient."

How modestly the Master speaks about what He gives! "Sufficient?" Is not there a margin? Is there not more than is wanted? The overplus is "exceeding abundant," not only "above what we ask or think," but far more than our need. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not *sufficient* that every one may take a little," says Sense. Omnipotence says, "Bring the few small loaves and fishes unto Me"; and Faith dispensed them amongst the crowd; and Experience "gathered up of the fragments that remained," more than there had been when the multiplication began. So the grace utilised increases; the gift grows as it is employed. "Unto him that hath shall be given." And the "sufficiency" is not a bare adequacy, just covering the extent of the need, with no overlapping margin, but is large beyond expectation, desire, or necessity, so leading onwards to high hopes and a wider opening of the open mouths of our need that the blessing may pour in.

The other part of this great answer, that the Christ from Heaven spoke in or to the praying spirit of this not disappointed, though refused, Apostle, unveiled the purpose of the sorrow, even as the former part had disclosed the strength to

bear it. For, says He, laying down therein the great law of His kingdom in all departments and in all ways, "My strength is made perfect"—that is, of course, perfect in its manifestation or operations, for it is perfect in itself already. "My strength is made perfect in weakness." It works in and through man's weakness.

God works with broken reeds. If a man conceits himself to be an iron pillar, God can do nothing with or by him. All the self-conceit and confidence have to be taken out of him first. He has to be brought low before the Father can use him for His purposes. The lowlands hold the water, and, if only the sluice is open, the gravitation of His grace does all the rest and carries the flood into the depths of the lowly heart.

His strength loves to work in weakness, only the weakness must be conscious, and the conscious weakness must have passed into conscious dependence. There, then, you get the law for the Church, for the works of Christianity on the widest scale and in individual lives. Strength that conceits itself to be such is weakness; weakness that knows itself to be such is strength. The only true source of Power, both for Christian work and in all other respects, is God Himself; and our strength is but ours by derivation from Him. And the only way to secure that derivation is through humble dependence, which we call faith in Jesus Christ. And the only way by which that faith in Jesus Christ can ever be kindled in a man's soul is through the sense of his need and emptiness. So when we know ourselves weak, we have taken the first step

to strength ; just as, when we know ourselves sinners, we have taken the first step to righteousness ; just as in all regions the recognition of the doleful fact of our human necessity is the beginning of the joyful confidence in the glad, triumphant fact of the Divine fulness. All our hollownesses, if I may so say, are met with His fulness that fits into them. It only needs that a man be aware of that which he is, and then turn himself to Him who is all that he is not, and then into his empty being will flow rejoicing the whole fulness of God. "My strength is made perfect in weakness."

III.—Lastly, mark the calm final acquiescence in the loving necessity of continued sorrow. "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmity that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The will is entirely harmonised with Christ's. The Apostle begins with instinctive shrinking, he passes onwards to a perception of the purpose of his trial and of the sustaining grace ; and he comes now to acquiescence which is not passivity, but glad triumph. He is more than submissive, he gladly glories in his infirmity in order that the power of Christ may "spread a tabernacle over" him. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," said the old prophet. Paul says, in a yet higher note of concord with God's will, "I am glad that I sorrow. I rejoice in weakness, because it makes it easier for me to cling, and, clinging, I am strong, and conquer evil." Far better is it that the sting of our sorrow should be taken away, by our having learned what it is for, and having bowed to it, than that it

should be taken away by the external removal which we sometimes long for. A grief, a trial, an incapacity, a limitation, a weakness, which we use as a means of deepening our sense of dependence upon Him, is a blessing, and not a sorrow. And if we would only go out into the world trying to interpret its events in the spirit of this great text, we should less frequently wonder and weep over what sometimes seem to us the insoluble mysteries of the sorrows of ourselves and of other men. They are all intended to make it more easy for us to realise our utter hanging upon Him, and so to open our hearts to receive more fully the quickening influences of His omnipotent and all-sufficing grace.

Here, then, is a lesson for those who have to carry some cross and know they must carry it throughout life. It will be wreathed with flowers if you accept it. Here is a lesson for all Christian workers. Ministers of the Gospel especially should banish all thoughts of their own cleverness, intellectual ability, culture, sufficiency for their work, and learn that only when they are emptied can they be filled, and only when they know themselves to be nothing are they ready for God to work through them. And here is a lesson for all who stand apart from the grace and power of Jesus Christ in fancied superiority to the need. Whether you know it or not, you are a broken reed; and the only hope of your ever being bound up and made strong is that you shall recognise your sinfulness, your necessity, your abject poverty, your utter emptiness, and come to Him Who is

righteousness, riches, fulness, and say, "Because I am weak, be Thou my Strength." The secret of all noble, heroic, useful, happy life lies in that paradox, "When I am weak, then am I strong," and the secret of all failures, miseries, hopeless losses, lies in its converse, "When I am strong, then am I weak."

XVI.

How to keep in the Love of God.

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."—JUDE 20, 21.

THE main subject of this singular little letter is the warning against certain teachers whose errors of belief and vices of conduct seem to have been equally great. After the vehement denunciation of these, which coincides in many particulars with the similar language of the second epistle ascribed to Peter, the writer turns, as with a sudden movement of revulsion, from the false teachers to exhort his readers to conduct contrary to theirs, and sets forth in these words the true way by which individuals and churches can guard themselves against abounding errors.

In the verses which I have taken for my text there is one great central injunction, round which are grouped subsidiary clauses, containing, in regard to those which precede it, the means of obeying the commandment; and in reference to that which follows it, an attendant expectation.

I.—We consider that central injunction—the very keystone of the arch of a devout Christian life—"Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Now "the love of God" here obviously means, not ours to Him, but His to us, and the commandment is parallel to, and may be a reminiscence of, our Lord's great word: "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Continue ye in My love." God's love to us is regarded as a kind of sphere or region in which the Christian soul lives and moves and has its being. It is the sweet home of our hearts, and a fortress "whereunto we may continually resort," and our wisdom and security is to keep at home within the strong walls that defend us, compassed by the warmth and protection of the love which God has towards us.

Then my text implies that Christian men may get outside of the love of God. No doubt "His tender mercies are over all His works." No doubt His love holds in a grasp which never can be loosened every creature that He hath made. But our earnestness in declaring the universality of the love of God ought never to lead us to speak of it so as to suggest that He is indifferent to moral distinctions, or that He so finds the reason for His love, in Himself, and not in us, as that it is all the same to its flow whether we be good or bad. There are gifts of the Divine love which, like the sunshine in the heaven, come equally on the unfaithful and on the good. But all the best and noblest manifestations of that love, and the sweetest, selectest aspects of that love itself, cannot come to men irrespective of their moral character and

their relation to Him. God loves all as well as they will let Him, but it is possible for men not only to modify the possibilities of the Divine love in its bestowment upon them, but to make it needful that that very love, when it finds its way to them, should come like the sun through the mist, shorn of its beauty and turned into a hot ball of lurid fire. And it is possible for Christians to be so unfaithful to their position and their calling as that they may get out of the warmth into the cold dank mists. The sun pours down, but you can cross the street from the sunny to the shady side and walk in the shadow. It is possible for Christian people to lose the consciousness of being surrounded and kept within that warm and sunny circle where God's love falls. And this exhortation puts, as the very centre of the devout life, considered in regard to the man himself and his relations to God, this: Keep yourselves in the charmed circle, and be sure that you walk in the light of His face and in the felt love of His heart.

Then another question is suggested by my text. I asked, Can a man get out of the love of God? And I have to ask now, Can a man, then, keep always in it? The ideal set forth here is that of unbroken continuity in the flow of that Divine love which falls in its gentlest and mightiest beams only upon the heart that aspires towards Him, and also a continual consciousness on my part that I am within the reach of its rays, and that it is well with me because I am. We need not discuss, for the guidance of our own lives and efforts, whether the entire realisation of the ideal

is possible for us here. Enough for us to know that we may all come indefinitely near to it, if not absolutely up to it. Enough for us to know that it is possible for Christian people to make their lives one long abiding in the love of God, both in regard of the actual reception of it and of the consciousness of that reception.

Alas! alas! what an awful contrast to the realities of the Christian life, as we see them around us and as we feel them within us, such an exhortation as this is! Instead of one unbroken line of light, what do we find? A dot of light and then a stretch of blackness; and then another little sparkle, scarcely visible, and short lived, followed by another dreary tract of murky midnight. So, alas! most of us have but gleams of sunshine, watery, weak, cloudy, brief, and then the doleful veil is drawn again over the blue, and we walk in the valley of the shadow. You who have felt the assurance that you dwell in the light of God's face, and that His love falls on you, do you see to it that the highest aim of your lives is to unite the severed points, and to turn them into a continuous and unbroken line. "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Is it not strange that we should need the exhortation? Is it not tragic that we should neglect it? The foolish creatures that stray away from the warm security of the mother-bird's breast are snapped up by the hawks; and they who have been within the enclosure of that love that specially surrounds those who know it and respond to it, and have wandered out, like worse prodigals,

into a further darkness, can hope for nothing, except they go back again with contrition, but famine and fever and rags and wretchedness.

The secret of all blessedness is to live in the love of God. Our sorrows and difficulties and trials will change their aspect, if we walk in the peaceful enjoyment and conscious possession of His Divine heart. That is the true anæsthetic. No pain is intolerable when we are sure that God's loving hand is round about us. There in that fortress we can be quiet. However the storms may be raging without, it is possible for us all to have a secret place into which we may retire, where we hear not the loud winds when they call. We may dwell at rest like the inhabitants of some deep, sunken dell, which is all still, without a breath to move the thick blossoms on the loaded trees, even whilst winds are raving and waves thundering on the iron-bound coast. "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

II.—Further, notice the subsidiary exhortations which point out the means of obeying this central command.

The two clauses in my text which precede that main precept are more minute and particular directions as to the way in which it is to be observed. We might almost read, "*By* building yourselves on your most holy faith, and *by* praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God."

The first means of securing our continual abiding in the conscious enjoyment of God's love

to us is our continual effort at building up a noble character on the foundation of faith. I need not enter upon the question as to whether here the "faith," which is the foundation, has its ordinary meaning in Scripture, of the act by which we trust or believe, or whether it has the later ecclesiastical and theological meaning of that on which our trust and belief are fixed. The two interpretations are either of them possible; both of them come substantially to the same thing. For the worth of my faith as the foundation of my life depends wholly on the firmness and steadfastness of that which my faith grasps. The foundation of all that is good and noble in a character is the going out of self to trust in God manifest in Jesus Christ. That is the real basis of everything that is great and lofty; that is the footing on which alone a man may work with certainty of success at the great task of self-culture and development. But the faith which is thus the foundation of all excellence is only the foundation. A great many of you think that it is the house, but it is only the basis on which the house may be built. The notion which is very common amongst Evangelical people is that faith is mainly of use as a means whereby we escape from the consequences of our sins, or whereby we are carried into some future haven of rest and blessedness. But the true conception of Christian faith is that it is the root from which may come, and ought to come, all nobility and excellence of character, "whatsoever things are pure, and lovely, and of good report." But it

is *only* the foundation; it is the "potentiality of wealth," but it is not the wealth. It is the possible root of all goodness, but it is not that goodness. "All things are possible to him that believeth," but they will be actually his in the measure of diligence which he "adds to his faith, virtue," and all the other beads of the Rosary of Christian graces. So do not make the mistake which such multitudes of stagnant, professing Christians do, of fancying that the foundation is the house. What would you say of a man who had dug his foundations, and got in the first courses, and then left the bricks lying on the ground, and did no more? And that is what many people that call themselves Christians do: they use their faith only as a shield against condemnation, and forget that, if it is anything at all, it works, and works by love.

Then remember, too, that this building of a noble and godlike and God-pleasing character can be erected on the foundation of faith only by constant effort. Growth is not the whole explanation of the process by which a man becomes what God would have him to be. Struggle has to be included as well as growth, and neither growth nor struggle exhaust the New Testament metaphors for progress. This other one of my text is of constant recurrence. It takes the metaphor of a building, to suggest the slow, continuous, bit-by-bit effort. You do not rear the fabric of a noble character all at a moment. No man reaches the extremity, either of goodness or baseness, *per saltum*, by a leap; you must be content with bit-

by-bit work. The Christian character is like a mosaic formed of tiny squares in all but infinite numbers, each one of them separately set and bedded in its place. You have to build by a plan; you have to see to it that each day has its task, each day its growth. You have to be content with one brick at a time. It is a life-long task, till the whole be finished. And not until we pass from earth to heaven does our building work cease. Continuous effort is the condition of progress.

How many of us have dropped the idea of progress out of our Christian practice altogether! What an enormous percentage of stagnant Christians there are amongst us, people that are no better to-day than they were ten years ago, because they have never grasped the conception of the Christian duty of endless toil at self-culture! My brother! unless you and I are daily finding more and more power to regulate and purify our lives in the faith that we profess, it becomes us to institute a very close examination as to whether our profession goes any deeper than our tongues. They, and only they, have a right to say, "I believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ His Son," in whom their faith is daily producing growth in the grace as well as in the knowledge which have Him for their object.

Now, look at the second of the conditions laid down here, by which that continual living within the charmed circle of the love of God is made possible. "Praying in the Holy Ghost." Who that has ever honestly tried to cure himself of a

fault, or to make his own some unfamiliar virtue opposed to his natural temperament, but has found that the cry "O God! help me" has come instinctively to his lips? I do not believe in the depth and earnestness of any efforts at self-improvement which have not often driven a man to his knees. Every person that has really closed in resolute serious combat with his own infirmities, and the enemies that beset him, must have felt that, unless he cries to God in the battle, he has little chance of success. Therefore, says Jude, continuous effort at building up a high and noble character will drive a man to, and must necessarily be accompanied with, prayer in the Holy Spirit. The prayer which helps us to keep in the love of God is not the petulant and passionate utterance of our own wishes, but is the yielding of our desires to the impulses divinely breathed upon us. As Michael Angelo says, "The prayers we make will then be sweet, indeed, If Thou the Spirit give by which we pray." Our own desires may be hot and vehement, but the desires that run parallel with the Divine will, and are breathed into us by God's own Spirit, are the desires which, in their meek submissiveness, are omnipotent with Him Whose omnipotence is perfected in our weakness.

Such prayer is the true help for the builder. His right attitude is on his knees. When men go out to weed some great field they often kneel at their task. And it is only when kneeling that we can cleanse the soil of our own hearts of the quick-growing and poisonous weeds that are there.

My prayer breaks the bond of many a temptation that holds me. My prayer is the test for many a masked evil that seeks to seduce me. My prayer will be like a drop of poison on a scorpion—it will kill the sin on the instant. We shall conquer when we go into the battle as the Puritans did, with the old Psalm upon their lips: "Let God arise; and let His enemies be scattered." If we would build a holy character on a holy faith it must be done with the help of prayer in the Holy Ghost.

III.—Lastly, notice here the expectation attendant on the obedience to the central commandment, "Looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

After all our efforts, after all our prayers, we all of us build much wood, hay, stubble, in the building which we rear on the true foundation. And the best of us, looking back over our past, will most deeply feel that it is all so poor and stained that all we have to trust to is the forgiving mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. That mercy will be anticipated for all the future, nearer and more remote, in proportion as we keep ourselves for the present in the love of God. The more we feel in our hearts the experience that God loves us, the more sure we shall be that He will love us ever. The sunshine in which we walk will be reflected upon all the path before us, and will illuminate that else dusky and foreboding sky that lies beyond the dark grave. The consciousness of His present love is the surest ground for the hope in Christ's future mercy. That mercy will scatter its pardon-

ing gifts all along the path of life, and will not reach its highest issue, nor be satisfied in its relation to us, until it has brought us into the full and perfect enjoyment of that super-eminent degree of eternal life which lies beyond the grave. Here we have rills from it by the way; there we shall be taken to the well-head of the Divine love. The gifts of God's mercy in Christ Jesus which we receive here, great and precious as they are, are but the small change given to us for the expenses of the road as we journey to the inheritance where God keeps boundless stores of uncoined gold for us. The mercy for which we look cannot stop till it has acquitted us at the bar of the great Judge, who is Jesus Christ, and has given to us the full possession of the perfect copy of His own eternal life. If you and I keep ourselves in the love of God by effort founded upon faith, and prospered by prayer, we may then look quietly forward to that solemn future, knowing our sins indeed, but sure of the love of God, and therefore sure of eternal life.

XVII.

A Death in the Desert.

"So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, . . . but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day."—DEUT. xxxiv. 5, 6.

A FITTING end to such a life! The great law-giver and leader had been all his days a lonely man; and now, surrounded by a new generation, and all the old familiar faces vanished, he is more solitary than ever. He had lived alone with God, and it was fitting that alone with God he should die.

How the silent congregation must have watched as, alone, with "natural strength unabated," he breasted the mountain, and went up to be seen no more! With dignified reticence our chapter tells us no details. He "died there," in that dreary solitude, and in some cleft he was buried, and no man knows where. The lessons of that solitary death and unknown tomb may best be learned by contrast with another death and another grave—those of the Leader of the New Covenant, the Law-giver and Deliverer from a worse bondage,

and Guide into a better Canaan, the Son who was faithful over His own house, as Moses was faithful in all his house, as a servant. The one dies amidst the cliffs, and his grave is visited only by the eagles and the clouds; the Other is buried close by a city wall, and His sepulchre is guarded by foes, and haunted by weeping friends, and filled with a great light of angel-faces, and *every* man knoweth His sepulchre unto this day.

I.—Note, then, first, as a lesson gathered from this lonely death, the penalty of transgression.

One of the great truths which the old law and ordinances given by Moses were intended to burn in on the conscience of the Jew, and through him on the conscience of the world, was that indissoluble connection between evil done and evil suffered, which reaches its highest exemplification in the death which is the wages of sin. And just as some men that have invented instruments for capital punishment have themselves had to prove the sharpness of their own axe, so the law-giver, whose message it has been to declare, "the soul that sinneth it shall die," had himself to go up alone to the mountain-top to receive in his own person the exemplification of the law that had been spoken by his own lips. He sinned when, in a moment of passion (with many palliations and excuses), he smote the rock that he was bidden to address, and forgot therein, and in his angry words to the rebels, that he was only an instrument in the Divine hand. It was a momentary wavering in a hundred and twenty years of obedience.

It was one failure in a life of self-abnegation and suppression. The stern sentence came.

People say, "A heavy penalty for a small offence." Yes! But an offence of Moses could not be a small offence. *Noblesse oblige!* The higher a man rises in communion with God, and the more glorious the message and office which are put into his hands, the more intolerable in him is the slightest deflection from the loftiest level. A splash of mud, that would never be seen on a navvy's clothes, stains the white satin of a bride or the embroidered garment of a noble. And so a little sin done by a loftily endowed and inspired man ceases to be small.

Nor are we to regard that momentary lapse only from the outside and the surface. One little mark under the armpit of a plague-sufferer tells the physician that the fatal disease is there. A tiny leaf above ground may reveal deep below, the root of a poison-plant. That little deflection, coming as it did at the beginning of the resumption of his functions by the Lawgiver after seven-and-thirty years of comparative abeyance, and on his first encounter with the new generation that he had to lead, was a very significant indication that his character had begun to yield and suffer from the strain that had been put upon it; and that, in fact, he was scarcely fit for the responsibilities that the new circumstances brought. So the penalty was not so disproportionate to the fault as it may seem.

And was the penalty such a very big one? Do you think that a man who had been toiling

for eighty years at a very thankless task would consider it a very great punishment to be told, "Go home and take your wages"? It did not mean the withdrawal of the Divine favour. "Moses and Aaron among his priests. Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." The penalty of a forgiven sin is never hard to bear, and the penalty of a forgiven sin is very often punctually and mercifully exacted.

But still we are not to ignore the fact that this lonely death, with which we are now concerned, has in it of the nature of a penal infliction. And so it stands forth in consonance with the whole tone of the Mosaic teaching. I admit, of course, that the mere physical fact of the separation between body and spirit is simply the result of natural law. But that is not the death that you and I know. Death as we know it, the ugly thing that flings its long shadows across all life, and that comes armed with terrors for conscience and spirit, is the "wages of sin," and is only possible to men who have transgressed the law of God. So far Moses in his life and in his death carries us—that no transgression escapes the appropriate punishment; that the smallest sin has in it the seeds of mortal consequences; that the loftiest saint does not escape the law of retribution.

And no further does Moses with his Law and his death carry us. But we turn to the other death. And there you get the confirmation, in an eminent degree, of that Law, and yet the repeal of it. It is confirmed and

exhausted in Jesus Christ. His death was "the wages of sin." Whose? Not His. Mine, yours, every man's. And because He died, surrounded by men, outside the old city wall, pure and sinless in Himself, He therein at once said "Amen" to the Law of Moses, and swept it away. For all the sins of the world were laid upon His head. He bore the curse for us all, and has emptied the bitter cup which men's transgressions have mingled. Therefore the solitary death in the desert proclaims "the wages of sin"; this death outside the city wall proclaims "the gift of God," which is "eternal life."

II.—Another of the lessons of our incident is the withdrawal, by a hard fate, of the worker on the very eve of the completion of his work.

For all these forty years there had gleamed before the fixed and steadfast spirit of the sorely tried Leader one hope that he never abandoned, and that was that he might look upon and enter into the blessed land which God had promised. And now he stands on the heights of Moab. Half-a-dozen miles, as the crow flies, and his feet would tread its soil. He lifts his eyes, and away, up yonder, in the far north, he sees the rolling uplands of Gilead, and across the deep gash where the Jordan runs he catches a glimpse of the blue hills of Naphtali or of Galilee, and the central mountain masses of Ephraim and Manasseh, where Ebal and Gerizim lift their heads; and then, further south, the stony summits of the Judæan hills, where Jerusalem and Bethlehem lie, and, through some gap in the mountains, a gleam as of sunshine upon

armour tells where the ocean is. And then his eye falls upon the waterless plateau of the south, and at his feet the fertile valley of Jordan, with Jericho glittering amongst its palm trees like a diamond set in emeralds, and on some spur of the lower hill bounding the plain the little Zoar. This was the land which the Lord had promised to the fathers, for which he had been yearning, and to which all his work had been directed all these years; and now he is to die, as my text puts it, with such pathetic emphasis, "*there in Moab*," and to have no part in the fair inheritance.

It is the lot of all epoch-making men, of all great constructive and reforming geniuses, whether in the Church or in the world, that they should toil at a task, the full issues of which will not be known until their heads are laid low in the dust. But if, on the one hand, that seems hard, on the other hand there is the compensation of "the vision of the future and all the wonder that shall be," which is granted many a time to the faithful worker ere he closes his eyes. But it is not the fate of epoch-making and great men only; it is the law for our little lives. If these are worth anything, they are constructed on a scale too large to bring out all their results here and now. It is easy for a man to secure immediate consequences of an earthly kind; easy enough for him to make certain that he shall have the fruit of his toil. But quick returns mean small profits; and an unfinished life that succeeds in nothing may be far better than a completed one that has realised all its shabby purposes and accomplished all its petty desires. Do

you, my brother, live for the far off; and seek not for the immediate issues and fruits that the world can give, but be contented to be of those whose toil waits for eternity to disclose its significance. Better a half-finished temple than a finished pigstye or huckster's shop. Better a life, the beginning of much and the completion of nothing, than a life directed to and hitting an earthly aim. "He that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting," and his harvest and garner are beyond the grave.

III.—Again, notice here the lesson of the solitude and mystery of death.

Moses dies alone, with no hand to clasp his, none to close his eyes; but God's finger does it. The outward form of his death is but putting into symbol and visibility the awful characteristics of that last moment for us all. However closely we have been twined with others, each of us has to unclasp all hands, and make that journey through the narrow, dark tunnel by himself. We live alone in a very real sense, but we each have to die as if there were not another human being in the whole universe but only ourselves. But the solitude may be a solitude with God. Up there, alone with the stars and the sky and the everlasting rocks and menacing death, Moses had for companion the supporting God. That awful path is not too desolate and lonely to be trodden if we tread it with Him.

Moses' lonely death leads to a society yonder. If you refer to the 32nd chapter you will find that, when he was summoned to the mountain, God said

to him, "Die in the mount whither thou goest up and be gathered to thy people." He was to be buried there, up amongst the rocks of Moab, and no man was ever to visit his sepulchre to drop a tear over it. How was he "gathered to his people"? Surely only thus, that, dying in the desert alone, he opened his eyes in the city, surrounded by "solemn troops and sweet societies" of those to whom he was kindred. So the solitude of a moment leads on to blessed and eternal companionship.

So far the death of Moses carries us. What does the other death say? Moses had nobody but God with him when he died. There is a drearier desolation than that, and Jesus Christ proved it when He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" That was solitude indeed, and in that hour of mysterious, and to us unfathomable, desertion and misery the lonely Christ sounded a depth, of which the Lawgiver in his death but skimmed the surface. Christ was parted from God in His death, because he bore on Him the sins that separated us from our Father, and in order that none of us may ever need to tread that dark passage alone, but may be able no say, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me"—Thou, Who hast trodden every step in its rough and dreary path, uncheered by the presence which cheers us and millions more. Christ died that we might live. He died alone that, when we come to die, we may hold His hand and the solitude may vanish.

Then, again, our incident teaches us the mystery that wrapped death to that ancient world, of which we may regard that unknown and forgotten sepulchre as the visible symbol. Deep darkness lies over the Old Testament in reference to what is beyond the grave, broken by gleams of light, when the religious consciousness asserted its indestructibility, in spite of all appearance to the contrary; but never rising to the height of serene and continual assurance of immortal life and resurrection. We may conceive that mysteriousness as set forth for us by that grave that was hidden away in the defiles of Moab, unvisited and uncared for by any.

We turn to the other grave, and there, as the stone is rolled away, and the rising sunshine of the Easter morning pours into it, we have a visible symbol of the life and immortality which Jesus Christ then brought to light by His Gospel. The buried grave speaks of the inscrutable mystery that wrapped the future: the open sepulchre proclaims the risen Lord of life, and the sunlight certainty of future blessedness which we owe to Him. Death is solitary no more, though it be lonely as far as human companionship is concerned; and a mystery no more, though what is beyond be hidden from our view, and none but Christ have ever returned to tell the tale, and He has told us little but the fact that we shall live with Him.

We rejoice that we have not to turn to a grave hid amongst the hills where our dead Leader lies, but to an open sepulchre by the city wall in the

sunshine, from whence has come the ever-living Captain of our salvation.

IV.—The last lesson is the uselessness of a dead Leader to a generation with new conflicts.

Commentators have spent a great deal of ingenuity in trying to assign reasons why God concealed the grave of Moses. The text does not say that God concealed it at all. The ignorance of the place of His sepulchre does not seem to have been part of the Divine design, but simply a consequence of the circumstances of his death, and of the fact that he lay in an enemy's land, and that Israel had something else to do than to go to look for the grave of a dead commander. It had to conquer the land, and a living Joshua was what it wanted; not a dead Moses.

So we may learn from this how easily the gaps fill. "Thirty days' mourning," and says my text, with almost a bitter touch, "so the days of mourning for Moses were ended." A month of it, that was all; and then everybody turned to the new man that was appointed for the new work. God has many tools in His tool-chest, and He needs them all before the work is done. Joshua could no more have wielded Moses' rod than Moses could have wielded Joshua's sword. The one did his work, and was laid aside. New circumstances required a new type of character—the smaller man better fitted for the rougher work. And so it always is. Each generation, each period, has its own men that do some little part of the work which has to be done, and then drop it and hand over the task to others. The

division of labour is the multiplication of joy at the end, and he that soweth and he that reapeth rejoice together.

But whilst the one grave tells us "this man served his generation by the will of God, and was laid asleep and saw corruption," the other grave proclaims One whom all generations need, Whose work is comprehensive and complete, who dies never. "He liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore." Christ, and Christ alone, can never be antiquated. This day requires Him, and has in Him as complete an answer to all its necessities as if no other generation had ever possessed Him. He liveth for ever, and for ever is the Shepherd of men.

So Aaron dies and is buried on Hor, and Moses dies and is buried on Pisgah, and Joshua steps into his place, and, in turn, he disappears. The one eternal Word of God worked through them all, and came at last Himself in human flesh to be the everlasting deliverer, redeemer, founder of a covenant, lawgiver, guide through the wilderness, captain of the warfare, and all that the world or a single soul can need until the last generation has crossed the flood, and all the wandering pilgrims are gathered in the land of their inheritance. The dead Moses pre-supposes and points to the living Christ. Let us take Him for our all-sufficing and eternal Guide.

XVIII.

From Centre to Circumference.

"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."—GAL. ii. 20.

WE have a bundle of paradoxes in this verse. First, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live." The Christian life is a dying life. If we are in any real sense joined to Christ, the power of His death makes us dead to self and sin and the world. In that region as in the physical, death is the gate of life; and, inasmuch as what we die to in Christ is itself only a living death, we live because we die, and in proportion as we do.

The next paradox is, "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." The Christian life is a life in which an indwelling Christ casts out and therefore quickens self. We gain ourselves when we lose ourselves. His abiding in us does not destroy but heightens our individuality. We then most truly live when we can say, "Not I, but Christ liveth in me"; the soul of my soul and the self of myself.

And the last paradox is that of my text, "The

life which I live in the flesh, I live in" (not "by") "the faith of the Son of God." The true Christian life moves in two spheres at once. Externally and superficially it is "in the flesh," really it is "in faith." It belongs not to the material nor is dependent upon the physical body in which we are housed. We are strangers here, and the true region and atmosphere of the Christian life is that invisible sphere of faith.

So, then, we have in these words of my text a Christian man's frank avowal of the secret of his own life. It is like a geological cutting, it goes down from the surface, where the grass and the flowers are, through the various strata, but it goes deeper than these, to the fiery heart, the flaming nucleus and centre of all things. Therefore it may do us all good to make a section of our hearts and see whether the *strata* there are conformable to those that are here.

I.—Let us begin with the centre, and work to the surface. We have, first, the great central fact named last, but round which all the Christian life is gathered.

"The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." These two words, the "loving" and the "giving," both point backwards to some one definite historical fact, and the only fact which they can have in view is the great one of the death of Jesus Christ. That is His giving up of Himself. That is the signal and highest manifestation and proof of His love.

Notice (though I can but touch in the briefest possible manner upon the great thoughts that

gather round these words) the three aspects of that transcendent fact, the centre and nucleus of the whole Christian life, which come into prominence in these words before us. Christ's death is a great act of self-surrender, of which the one motive is His own pure and perfect love. No doubt in other places of Scripture we have set forth the death of Christ as being the result of the Father's purpose, and we read that in that wondrous surrender there were two givings up. The Father "freely gave Him up to the death for us all." That Divine surrender, the Apostle ventures, in another passage, to find dimly suggested from afar, in the silent but submissive and unreluctant surrender with which Abraham yielded *his* only begotten son on the mountain top. But besides that ineffable giving up by the Father of the Son, Jesus Christ Himself, moved only by His love, willingly yields Himself. The whole doctrine of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has been marred by one-sided insisting on the truth that God sent the Son, to the forgetting of the fact that the Son "came"; and that He was bound to the Cross neither by cords of man's weaving nor by the will of the Father, but that He Himself bound Himself to that Cross with the cords of love and the bands of a man, and died from no natural necessity nor from any imposition of the Divine will upon Him unwilling, but because He would, and that He would because He loved. "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Then note, further, that here, most distinctly, that great act of self-surrendering love which

culminates on the Cross is regarded as being for man in a special and peculiar sense. I know, of course, that from the mere wording of my text we cannot argue the atoning and substitutionary character of the death of Christ, for the preposition here does not necessarily mean "instead of," but "for the behoof of." But admitting that, I have another question. If Christ's death is for "the behoof of" men, in what conceivable sense does it benefit them, unless it is in the place of men? The death "for me" is only for me when I understand that it is "instead of" me. And practically you will find that wherever the full-orbed faith in Christ Jesus as the death for all the sins of the whole world, bearing the penalty and bearing it away, has begun to falter and grow pale, men do not know what to do with Christ's death at all, and stop talking about it to a very large extent.

Unless He died as a sacrifice, I, for one, fail to see in what other than a mere sentimental sense the death of Christ is a death for men.

And lastly, about this matter, observe how here we have brought into vivid prominence the great thought that Jesus Christ in His death has regard to single souls. We preach that He died for all. If we believe in that august title which is laid here as the vindication of our faith on the one hand, and as the ground of the possibility of the benefits of His death being world-wide on the other—viz., the Son of God—then we shall not stumble at the thought that He died for all, because He died for each. I know that if you only

regard Jesus Christ as human I am talking utter nonsense; but I know, too, that if we believe in the divinity of our Lord, there need be nothing to stumble us, but the contrary, in the thought that it was not an abstraction that He died for, that it was not a vague mass of unknown beings, clustered together, but so far away that He could not see any of their faces, for whom He gave His life on the Cross. That is the way in which, and in which alone, *we* can embrace the whole mass of humanity—by losing sight of the individuals. We generalise, precisely because we do not see the individual units; but that is not God's way, and that is not Christ's way, Who is Divine. For Him the *all* is broken up into its parts, and when we say that the Divine love loves all, we mean that the Divine love loves each. I believe (and I commend the thought to you), that we do not fathom the depth of Christ's sufferings unless we recognise that the sins of each man were consciously adding pressure to the load beneath which He sank; nor picture the wonders of His love until we believe that on the Cross it distinguished and embraced each, and, therefore, comprehended all. Every man may say "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

II.—So much, then, for the first central fact that is here. Now let me say a word, in the second place, about the faith which makes that fact the foundation of my own personal life.

"I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." I am not going to plunge into any unnecessary dissertations about

the nature of faith; but may I say that, like all other familiar conceptions, it has got worn so smooth that it glides over our mental palate without roughening any of the *papillæ* or giving any sense or savour at all? And I do believe that dozens of people like you, that have come to church and chapel all your lives, and fancy yourselves to be fully *au fait* at all the Christian truth that you will ever hear from my lips, do not grasp with any clearness of apprehension the meaning of that fundamental word "faith."

It is a thousand pities that it is confined by the accidents of language to our attitude in reference to Jesus Christ. So some of you think that it is some kind of theological juggle which has nothing to do with, and never can be seen in operation in, common life. Suppose, instead of the threadbare technical "faith" we took to a new translation for a minute, and said "*trust*," do you think that would freshen up the thought to you at all? It is the very same thing which makes the sweetness of your relations to wife and husband and friend and parent, which transferred to Jesus Christ and glorified in the process, becomes the seed of immortal life and the opener of the gate of Heaven. Trust Jesus Christ. That is the living centre of the Christian life; that is the process by which we draw the general blessing of the Gospel into our own hearts, and make the world-wide truth our truth.

I need not insist either, I suppose, on the necessity, if our Christian life is to be modelled upon the Apostolic lines, of our faith embracing

the Christ in all these aspects in which I have been speaking about His work. God forbid that I should seem to despise rudimentary and incomplete feelings after Him which may be in any heart not able to say "Amen" to Paul's statement here. I want to insist very earnestly, and with special reference to the young, that the true Christian faith is not merely the grasp of a person, but it is the grasp of the Person who is "declared to be the Son of God," and whose death is the voluntary self-surrender motived by His love, for the carrying away of the sins of every single soul in the whole universe. That is the Christ, the full Christ, cleaving to whom our faith finds somewhat to grasp worthy of grasping And I beseech you, be not contented with a partial grasp of a partial Saviour; neither shut your eyes to the Divinity of His nature, nor to the efficacy of His death, but remember that the true Gospel preaches Christ and Him crucified; and that for us, saving faith is the faith that grasps the Son of God "Who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Note, further, that true faith is personal faith, which appropriates, and, as it were, fences in as my very own the purpose and benefit of Christ's giving of Himself. It is always difficult for lazy people (and most of us are lazy) to transfer into their own personal lives and to bring into actual contact with themselves and their own experience, wide, general truths. To assent to them, when we keep them in their generality, is very easy and very profitless. It does no man any good to say

"All men are mortal"; but how different it is when the blunt end of that generalisation is shaped into a point, and I say "I have to die!" It penetrates then, and it sticks. It is easy to say "All men are sinners." That never forced anybody down on his knees yet. But when we shut out on either side the lateral view and look straight on, on the narrow line of our own lives, up to the Throne where the Lawgiver sits, and feel "I am a sinful man," that sends us to our prayers for pardon and purity. And in like manner nobody was ever wholesomely terrified by the thought of a general judgment. But when you translate it into "I must stand there," the terror of the Lord persuades men.

In like manner that great truth which we all of us say we believe, that Christ has died for the world, is utterly useless and profitless to us until we have translated it into Paul's world, "loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*." I do not say that the essence of faith is the conversion of the general statement into the particular application, but I do say that there is no faith which does not realise one's personal possession of the benefits of the death of Christ, and that until you turn the wide word into a message for yourself alone, you have not yet got within sight of the blessedness of the Christian life. The whole river may flow past me, but only so much of it as I can bring into my own garden by my own sluices, and lift in my own bucket, and put to my own lips, is of any use to me. The death of Christ for the world is a commonplace of superficial Christianity, which is no

Christianity; the death of Christ for myself, as if He and I were the only beings in the universe, that is the death on which faith fastens and feeds.

And, dear brother, you have the right to exercise it. The Christ loves each, and therefore he loves all; that is the process in the Divine mind. The converse is the process in the revelation of that mind; the Bible says to us, Christ loves all, and therefore we have the right to draw the inference that He loves each. You have as much right to take every "whosoever" of the New Testament as your very own, as if on the page of your Bible that "whosoever" was struck out and your name, John, Thomas, Mary, Elizabeth, or whatever it is, were put in there. "He loved *me*." Can *you* say that? Have you ever passed from the region of universality, which is vague and profitless, into the region of personal appropriation of the person of Jesus Christ and His death?

III.—And now, lastly, notice the life which is built upon this faith.

The true Christian life is dual. It is a life in the flesh, and it is also a life in faith. These two, as I have said, are like two spheres, in either of which a man's course is passed, or, rather, the one is surface and the other is central. Here is a great trailing spray of seaweed floating golden on the unquiet water, and rising and falling on each wave or ripple. Aye! but its root is away deep, deep, deep below the storms, below where there is motion, anchored upon a hidden rock that can never move. And so my life, if it be a Christian life at all, has its surface amidst the shifting muta-

bilities of earth, but its root in the silent eternities of the centre of all things, which is Christ in God. I live in the flesh on the outside, but if I am a Christian at all, I live in faith in regard of my true and proper being.

This faith, which grasps the Divine Christ as the person whose love-moved death is my life, and who by faith becomes Himself the indwelling Guest in my heart; this faith, if it be worth anything, will mould and influence my whole being. It will give me motive, pattern, power for all noble service and all holy living. The one thing that stirs men to true obedience is that their hearts be touched with the firm assurance that Christ loved them and died for them.

We sometimes used to see men starting an engine by manual force; and what toil it was to get the great cranks to turn and the pistons to rise! So we set ourselves to try and move our lives into holiness and beauty and nobleness, and it is dispiriting work. There is a far better, surer way than that: let the steam in, and that will do it. That is to say—let the Christ in His dying power and the living energy of His indwelling Spirit occupy the heart, and activity becomes blessedness, and work is rest, and service is freedom and dominion.

The life that I live in the flesh is poor, limited, tortured with anxiety, weighed upon by sore distresses, becomes dark and gray and dreary often as we travel nearer the end, and is always full of miseries and of pains. But if within that life in the flesh there be a life in faith, which is the life of

Christ Himself brought to us through our faith, that life will be triumphant, quiet, patient, aspiring, noble, hopeful, gentle, strong, Godlike, being the life of Christ Himself within us.

So, dear friends, test your faith by these two tests, what it grasps and what it does. If it grasps a whole Christ, in all the glory of His nature and the blessedness of His work, it is genuine; and it proves its genuineness if, and only if, it works in you by love; animating all your action, bringing you ever into the conscious presence of that dear Lord, and making Him pattern, law, motive, goal, companion and reward. "To me to live is Christ."

If so, then we live indeed; but to live in the flesh is to die; and the death that we die when we live in Christ is the gate and the beginning of the only real life of the soul.

XIX.

The Guiding Pillar.

"So it was alway; the cloud covered the tabernacle by day, and the appearance of fire by night."—NUMBERS ix. 16.

THE children of Israel in the wilderness, surrounded by miracle, had nothing which we do not possess. They had some things in an inferior form; their sustenance came by manna, ours comes by God's blessing on our daily work, which is better. Their guidance came by this supernatural pillar; ours comes by the reality of which that pillar was nothing but a picture. And so, instead of fancying that men thus led were in advance of us, we should learn that these, the supernatural manifestations, visible and palpable, of God's presence and guidance were the beggarly elements: "God having provided some better thing for us that they without us should not be made perfect,"

With this explanation of the relation between the miracle and symbol of the old, and the reality and standing miracle of the new covenants, let us look at the eternal truths, which are set

before us in a transitory form, in this cloud by day and fiery pillar by night.

I.—Note, first, the double form of the guiding pillar.

The fire was the centre, the cloud was wrapped around it. The former was the symbol, making visible to a generation who had to be taught through their senses the inaccessible holiness and flashing brightness and purity of the Divine nature; the latter tempered and veiled the too great brightness for feeble eyes.

The same double element is found in all God's manifestations of Himself to men. In every form of revelation are present both the heart and core of light, which no eye can look upon, and the merciful veil which, because it veils, unveils; because it hides, reveals; makes visible because it conceals; and shows God because it is the hiding of His power. So, through all the history of His dealings with men, there has ever been what is called in Scripture language the "face," or the "name of God"; the aspect of the Divine nature on which eye can look; and manifested through it, there has always been the depth and inaccessible abyss of that infinite Being. We have to be thankful that in the cloud is the fire, and that round the fire is the cloud. For only so can our eyes behold and our hands grasp the else invisible and remote central Sun of the universe. God hides to make better known the glories of His character. His revelation is the flashing of the uncreated and intolerable light of His infinite Being through the encircling

clouds of human conceptions and words, or of deeds which each show forth, in forms fitting to our apprehension, some fragment of His lustre. After all revelation, He remains unrevealed. After ages of showing forth His glory, He is still the King invisible, whom no man hath seen at any time nor can see. The revelation which He makes of Himself is "truth and is no lie." The recognition of the presence in it of both the fire and the cloud does not cast any doubt on the reality of our imperfect knowledge, or the authentic participation in the nature of the central light, of the sparkles of it which reach us. We know with a real knowledge what we know of Him. What He shows us is Himself, though not His whole self.

This double aspect of all possible revelation of God, which was symbolised in comparatively gross external form in the pillar that led Israel on its march, and lay stretched out and quiescent, a guarding covering above the tabernacle when the weary march was still, recurs all through the history of Old Testament revelation by type and prophecy and ceremony, in which the encompassing cloud was comparatively dense, and the light which pierced it relatively faint. It re-appears in both elements in Christ, but combined in new proportions, so as that "the veil, that is to say, His flesh," is thinned to transparency and all aglow with the indwelling lustre of manifest Deity. So a light, set in some fair alabaster vase, shines through its translucent walls, bringing out every delicate tint and meandering vein of colour, while itself diffused and softened by the enwrapping medium which it

beautifies by passing through its purity. Both are made visible and attractive to dull eyes by the conjunction. He that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father, and he that hath seen the Father in Christ hath seen the man Christ, as none see Him who are blind to the incarnate deity which illuminates the manhood in which it dwells.

But we have to note also the varying appearance of the pillar according to need. There was a double change in the pillar according to the hour, and according as the congregation was on the march or encamped. By day it was a cloud, by night it glowed in the darkness. On the march it moved before them, an upright pillar, as gathered together for energetic movement; when the camp rested it "returned to the many thousands of Israel" and lay quietly stretched above the tabernacle like one of the long-drawn, motionless clouds above the setting summer's sun, glowing through all its substance with unflashing radiance reflected from unseen light, and "on all the glory" (shrined in the Holy Place beneath) was "a defence."

Both these changes of aspect symbolise for us the reality of the Protean capacity of change according to our ever-varying needs, which for our blessing we may find in that ever-changing, unchanging, Divine presence which will be our companion, if we will.

It was not only by a natural process that, as daylight declined, what had seemed but a column of smoke, in the fervid desert sunlight, brightened into a column of fire, blazing amid the clear stars. But we may well believe in an actual admeasure-

ment of the degree of light, correspondent to the darkness and to the need for certitude and cheering sense of God's protection, which the defenceless camp would feel as they lay down to rest.

When the deceitful brightness of earth glistens and dazzles around me, my vision of Him may be "a cloudy screen to temper the deceitful ray"; and when "there stoops on our path, in storm and shade, the frequent night," as earth grows darker, and life becomes grayer and more sombre, and verges to its even, the pillar blazes brighter before the weeping eye, and draws nearer to the lonely heart. We have a God that manifests Himself in the pillar of cloud by day, and in the flaming fire by night.

II.—Note the guidance of the pillar.

When it lifts the camp marches; when it glides down and lies motionless the march is stopped and the tents are pitched. The main thing which is dwelt upon in this description of the God-guided pilgrimage of the wandering people is the absolute uncertainty in which they were kept as to the duration of their encampment, and as to the time and circumstances of their march. Sometimes the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle many days; sometimes for a night only; sometimes it lifted in the night. "Whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up they journeyed." So

never, from moment to moment, did they know when the moving cloud might settle, or the resting cloud might soar. Therefore, absolute uncertainty as to the next stage was visibly represented before them by that hovering guide which determined everything, and concerning whose next movement they knew absolutely nothing.

Is not that all true about us? We have no guiding cloud like this. So much the better. Have we not a more real guide? God guides us by circumstances, God guides us by His word, God guides us by His Spirit, speaking through our common sense and in our understandings, and, most of all, God guides us by that dear Son of His, in whom is the fire and round whom is the cloud. And perhaps we may even suppose that our Lord implies some allusion to this very symbol in His own great words, "I am the Light of the world. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." For the conception of "following" the light seems to make it plain that our Lord's image is not that of the sun in the heavens, or any such supernal light, but of some light that comes near enough to a man to move before him, and behind which he can march. So, I think, that Christ Himself laid His hand upon this ancient symbol, and in these great words said in effect, "I am that which it only shadowed and foretold." At all events, whether in them He was pointing to our text or no, we must feel that He is the reality which was expressed by this outward symbol. And no man who can say, "Jesus

Christ is the Captain of my salvation, and after His pattern I march: at the pointing of His guiding finger I move; and in His footsteps, He being my helper, I want to tread," need feel or fancy that any possible pillar, floating before the dullest eye, was a better, surer, or Diviner guide than he possesses. They whom Christ guides want none other for leader, pattern, counsellor, companion, reward. This Christ is our Christ for ever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death and beyond it. The pillar that we follow, which will glow with the ruddy flame of love in the darkest hours of life—blessed be His Name—will glide in front of us through the valley of the shadow of death, brightest then when the murky midnight is blackest. Nor will the pillar which guides us cease to blaze, as did the guide of the desert march, when Jordan had been crossed. It will still move before us on paths of continuous and ever-increasing approach to infinite perfection. They who follow Christ afar off and with faltering steps here shall there "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

In like manner, the same absolute uncertainty which was intended to keep the Israelites (though it failed often) in the attitude of constant dependence, is the condition in which we all have to live, though we mask it from ourselves. That we do not know what lies before us is a commonplace. The same long tracts of monotonous continuance in the same place, and doing the same duties befall us that befell these men. Years pass and the pillar spreads itself out, a defence above

the unmoving sanctuary. And then, all of a flash when we are least thinking of change, it gathers itself together, is a pillar again, shoots upwards, and moves forwards; and it is for us to go after it. And so our lives are shuttlecocked between uniform sameness which may become mechanical monotony, and agitation by change which may make us lose our hold of fixed principles and calm faith, unless we recognise that the continuance and the change are alike the will of the guiding God, whose Will is signified by the stationary or moving pillar.

III.—That leads me to the last thing that I would note—viz., the docile following of the Guide.

In the context, the writer does not seem to be able to get away from the thought that whatever the pillar did, immediate prompt obedience followed. He says it over and over and over again. "As long as the cloud abode they rested, and when the cloud tarried long they journeyed not"; and "when the cloud was a few days on the tabernacle they abode"; and "according to the commandment they journeyed"; and "when the cloud abode until the morning they journeyed"; and "whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried they journeyed not but abode in their tents." So, after he has reiterated the thing half-a-dozen times or more, he finishes by putting it all again in one verse, as the last impression which he would leave from the whole narrative—"at the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed." Obedience was prompt; whensoever

and for whatsoever the signal was given, the men were ready. In the night, after they had had their tents pitched for a long period, when only the watcher's eyes were open, the pillar lifts, and in an instant the alarm is given, and all the camp is in a bustle. That is what we have to set before us as the type of our lives. We are to be as ready for every indication of God's will as they were. The peace and blessedness of our lives largely depend on our being eager to obey, and therefore quick to perceive, the slightest sign of motion in the resting or of rest in the moving pillar, which regulates our march and our encamping.

What do we want in order to cultivate and keep such a disposition? We need perpetual watchfulness lest the pillar should lift unnoticed. When Nelson was second in command at Copenhagen, the admiral in command of the fleet hoisted the signal for recall, and Nelson put his telescope to his blind eye and said, "I do not see it." That is very like what we are tempted to do. When the signal for unpleasant duties that we want to get out of is hoisted, we are very apt to put the telescope to the blind eye, and pretend to ourselves that we do not see the fluttering flags.

We need still more to keep our wills in absolute suspense, if His will has not declared itself. Do not let us be in a hurry to run before God. When the Israelites were crossing the Jordan, they were told to leave a great space between themselves and the guiding ark, that they might know how to go, because "they had not passed that way heretofore." Impatient hurrying at God's heels is

apt to lead us astray. Let Him get well in front that you may be quite sure which way He wants you to go, before you go. And if you are not sure which way He wants you to go, be sure that He does not at that moment want you to go anywhere.

We need to hold the present with a slack hand, so as to be ready to fold our tents and take to the road, if God will. We must not reckon on continuance, nor strike our roots so deep that it needs a hurricane to remove us. To those who set their gaze on Christ, no present, from which He wishes them to remove, can be so good for them as the new conditions into which He would have them pass. It is hard to leave the spot, though it be in the desert, where we have so long encamped that it has come to feel like home. We may look with regret on the circle of black ashes on the sand where our little fire glinted cheerily, and our feet may ache and our hearts ache more as we begin our tramp once again, but we must set ourselves to meet the God-appointed change cheerfully, in the confidence that nothing will be left behind which it is not good to lose, nor anything met which does not bring a blessing, however its first aspect may be harsh or sad.

We need, too, to cultivate the habit of prompt obedience. "I made haste and delayed not to keep Thy commandments" is the only safe motto. It is reluctance which usually puts the drag on. Slow obedience is often the germ of incipient disobedience. In matters of prudence and of intellect, second thoughts are better than first, and third

thoughts, which often come back to first ones, better than second; but, in matters of duty, first thoughts are generally best. They are the instinctive response of conscience to the voice of God, while second thoughts are too often the objections of disinclination, or sloth, or cowardice. It is easiest to do our duty when we are at first sure of it. It then comes with an impelling power which carries us over obstacles on the crest of a wave, while hesitation and delay leave us stranded in shoal water. If we would follow the pillar, we must follow it at once.

A heart that waits and watches for God's direction, that uses common sense as well as faith to unravel small and great perplexities, and is willing to sit loose to the present, however pleasant, in order that it may not miss the indications which say "Arise! this is not your rest"—fulfils the conditions on which, if we keep them, we may be sure that He will guide us by the right way, and bring us at last to the city of habitation.

XX.

Righteousness First, then Peace.

"First being by interpretation King of Righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of Peace."—Heb. vii. 2.

THE mysterious figure of Melchisedec is here taken as being a significant allegory of Jesus Christ. That figure starts out of the history in Genesis with a strange abruptness. He unites in himself the two offices, the separation of which was essential in Judaism, and the union of which has so often been a curse—of King and priest. He has no recorded ancestors or predecessors, and no sons or successors, and the absence of any mention of those from whom he received, or to whom he bequeathed, his double functions, suggested to the author of Psalm cx. the use of Melchisedec as a type of the eternal priesthood of the mysterious monarch whose conquering kingdom he foretold. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews echoes the Psalm, but adds some other points to the prophetic significance of the dim figure of that ancient priest-king. His name is probably significant—"king of righteousness"—expressive of his personal character, of the animating principle of

his dominion and the purpose of his reign. The name of his city is significant—"Salem": that is, peace. Amidst the barbarisms of the military monarchies of the time, this strange figure stands as a witness of the aspirations of man after a dominion which is not a tyranny or founded on arbitrary will, and of a realm in which the swords are beaten into ploughshares and the spears into pruning-hooks.

But our writer sees still a further significance in the order in which the names occur. Of course, this is a play of fancy, but it is fancy which pierces deeply into fact. Christ is "King of Righteousness," and after that, and only "*after* that, also King of Peace." The order of designation is the order of manifestation, and in it the writer finds a symbol of some of the deepest things about Christ and His kingdom. I want to point out in two or three words some various applications of this thought.

I.—First, then, we find in this order a hieroglyphic of Christ's reconciling work.

First, King of Righteousness, afterwards King of Peace. There is no peace and amity with God possible, except on the basis of righteousness. If we are to believe that he is indifferent to moral distinctions, and that men hating righteousness and loving iniquity can live in friendship and concord with Him, then all our hopes are gone, and

> The pillared firmament were rottenness,
> And earth's base built on stubble.

It is a true gospel, however harsh it sounds, which proclaims "Thou art not a God that hast

pleasure in iniquity, neither shall the wicked dwell in Thy sight." This is the dictate of conscience; this is the dictate of what people call "natural religion." This, the necessity of righteousness for friendship with God, is the message of the old covenant; and this, the absolute need of purity and cleanness of life and heart for all true enjoyment of the Divine favour, is Christ's message as truly.

Nay, further, the first thing which the Gospel—which Christ, who is the Gospel—does when He comes into a man's heart is to emphasize two facts, —the absolute need for righteousness in order to friendship with God, and the want of it in the heart to which He has come. And so the conflict is intensified, the sense of discord is kindled, the alienation between man and God is made conscious on the first entrance of Christ into the spirit. Instead of coming with peace, He comes with a sword, a sword which pierces to the "dividing asunder of the joints and marrow and to the discerning of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The oil comes after the arrow, the bandage after the wound. The bandage and the oil have no blessing or preciousness, except the wound and the arrow come first. And the first word of the peace-bringing Christ, whose mission it is to reconcile men with God, deepens and aggravates, sometimes to despair, and always to bitterness, the consciousness of a separation between man and God.

First, King of Righteousness, and after that King of Peace. For when once the consciousness of alienation, enmity (or at least the absence of

concord), has been kindled in the heart, then the next step is the gift of righteousness. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God." We do not need to plunge here into the subtleties of technical theology, but here is the great message round which all the power of Christianity has centred, and from which it all flows, that by humble faith in Jesus Christ, we may all be so united to Him as that we may receive pardon, and stand before God as righteous, and obtain the grant of a true new spirit of righteousness and purity. Christ, by our union with Him, becomes our righteousness in no mere artificial and forensic sense, but in this most deep and real sense, that He, by His Divine power, pours Himself into the trusting heart, and thereby turns its evil into good, and makes it, though but in germ, in its deepest centre righteous and loving righteousness. Joined to Him, our faith receives the righteousness which is of God, and is ours through Christ.

And so the peace comes. First, as King of Righteousness, He bestows His own righteousness upon us, and makes us, therefore, capable, and only thereby capable of entering into loving relationship with God Himself. On the hearts thus pardoned and cleansed, as upon some mirror, polished from its rust and stains, the living sunshine can fall, and play, and create the image of itself on the now brilliant but once dark surface. He is King of Peace because He is King of Righteousness.

Dear brethren, here are the two great principles which this text enforces upon us: no peace with

God without righteousnesss; no way of getting righteousness but union with Jesus Christ.

II.—And so, secondly, I see in this order a summary of Christ's operations in the individual soul.

There is no inward harmony, no peace of heart and quietness of nature, except on condition of being good and righteous men. The real root of all our agitations and distractions is our sinfulness; and wherever there creeps over a heart the love of evil, there comes, like some subtle sea-born mist stealing up over the country and blotting out all its features, a poisonous obscuration which shrouds all the spirit in its doleful folds. Disturbance comes not so much from outward causes as from an inward alienation towards that which is pure and good. "The wicked is as the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." When your consciences are pulling one way and your lusts another, when the flesh is fighting against the spirit, and, if I may so say, the spirit has its back to the wall and is vainly trying to beat down the impulses of the stinging flesh; when reason says, "Don't," and inclination says, "But I will," what tranquillity is there possible for you? The only way by which we can walk in peace is by living in righteousness. "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

And now, remember, by righteousness we do not mean any abstract theological virtue, but we mean the plain dictates of conscience obeyed; that you shall be good men, even in the world's sense of goodness; we mean that you shall be

just, chaste, temperate, self-controlling, gentle, placable, kind, enduring, practising "whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report." And it is the hearty love of these, and the continual cultivation of them, that alone can bring secure peace to the heart. You will get these, and the desire for them, only by keeping close to Christ that He may bestow them, as He will, upon you. Peace within comes from righteousness within, and no man is righteous unless he has Christ's righteousness for the very spring and strength of his life.

III.—Thirdly, I see in this order the programme of Christ's operations in the world.

The herald angels sang "on earth peace." Nineteen centuries have passed, and Christianity is still a revolutionary and disturbing element wherever it comes, and the promise seems to linger, and the great words that declared "Unto us a child" should "be born" . . . and His name shall be . . . "the Prince of Peace," seem as far away from fulfilment as ever they were. Yes, because He is *first of all* King of Righteousness, and must destroy the evil that is in the world before He can manifest Himself as King of Peace.

So the very psalm on which my text is founded, with its singular vision of a priest-king scarcely paralleled in the whole course of Messianic prophecy, whilst it sets forth the dim figure of a priest after the order of Melchisedec, arrays him in the garb of a warrior, and shows us his armies following him in the

conflict. David and Solomon have both to be taken together, and in the order in which they reigned, in order to complete the programme of Christ's work in the world. His coming brings effervescence and tumult. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword." And so, blessed be His name! it will always be. "In righteousness He doth judge and make war." His kingdom of peace will be set up through confusion and destruction. overturning and overturning until the world has learned to know and love His name. First, King of Righteousness — that, at all hazards — that, though conflict may dog His steps and warfare ever wait upon Him—first, King of Righteousness, and *after that*, King of Peace.

So learn the duty of His servants. There are plenty of us who seek in our religion comfort, pleasant emotion, a sense of the Divine favour, an assurance of pardon, a hope of Heaven, with a great deal more earnestness than we seek in it a means of conquering our own sins and of helping us to conquer the world's sin.

Let us beware of all forms of Christianity which either fail to answer the question, "How can an unrighteous man find peace with God?" or which fail to answer the question, "How can I make myself more and more pure and good?" or which fail to send the Christian warrior out into the world with a religion in his hand which is not only his own balm and comfort, his own support and strength, but also his weapon, mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds.

If we are the followers of the Prince of Peace, who is, first of all, King of Righteousness, we are called to be His faithful servants and soldiers. For all the social evils that swarm round about us to-day, intemperance, impurity, commercial dishonesty, follies of fashionable and of social life and the like, for all teachings that dim and darken the face of His great counsel and purpose of mercy, we are to cherish an undying hatred, and war against them an unceasing warfare.

My text ought to be as a trumpet call to every Christian man, banishing the foolish dreams of a selfish and ignoble peace, and awaking him to the consciousness that peace is only to be won through long, continued conflict, and that to seek for tranquillity before we have fought the fight is an anachronism, and to indulge ourselves in quiet repose whilst the world lieth in the wicked one is treason to our Master and a misreading of His Gospel. The "men that turn the world upside down" was the designation of the early Christians. Ye are called to peace, but ye are called to fight for peace, and to win it by your swords. So far to-day the task is conflict, and for to-morrow the assurance is victory and repose.

IV.—And that brings me to the last word. I see in this order the prophecy of the end.

The true Salem, the city of peace, is not here. One more conflict every soldier of the Cross, ere he treads its pavement, has to wage with the last enemy who is to be destroyed by Jesus Christ, but to be destroyed only at "the end." For us and for the world the assurance stands firm that

the King, who Himself is Righteousness, is the King whose city is peace. And that city will come. "I saw the New Jerusalem descending out of Heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband," and within its streets there shall be no tumult nor conflict, and its gates need not be "shut day nor night." "The kindly earth shall slumber," lapped in universal law," the law of the King of Righteousness. He at last, after that awful final conflict when the armies of Heaven ride forth behind Him whose name is the Word of God, shall be manifested as the eternal and peaceful King.

So, dear brethren, the sum of the whole thing is, peace is sure; peace with God; peace in my own tranquil and righteous heart; peace for a world, from out of which sin shall be scourged; peace is sure, because righteousness is ours, since it is Christ's. And for ourselves, if we want—and who does not want?—to "be found of Him in peace, without spot blameless," let us see to it that we "are found, not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God through faith." Christ is King of Peace only to those to whom He has become, through their humble trust, the King of Righteousness.

XXI.

The New Name.

"To him that overcometh will I give . . . a new name . . . which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."—REV. ii. 17.

THE series of sevenfold promises attached to these letters to the Asiatic churches presents us with a sevenfold aspect of future blessedness. They begin with the reversal of man's first sorrow and the promise of regaining the lost Paradise, the return of the "statelier Eden," and full access to the tree of life. They end with that beyond which nothing higher can be conceived or experienced, a share in the royalty and the throne of Jesus Christ Himself.

There may be traced in them many interesting links of connection and sequence, as well as in general a correspondence between them and the trials or graces of the church addressed. In the present case the little community at Pergamos was praised because it held fast Christ's name, and so there is promised to it a new name as its very own. I need not trouble you with any discussion about what may be the significance of the "white stone" on which this new name is represented

in the text as written. Commentators have indulged in a whirl of varying conjectures about it, and no certainty has, as it seems to me, been attained. The allusion is one to which we have lost the key, and as I do not know what it means I do not pretend to explain. Probably it means nothing separately, and the "white stone" only comes into vision as the vehicle on which is inscribed the "new name," which is the substance of the promise. At all events, it is that alone to which I desire to turn your attention.

I.—Consider, first, the large hopes which gather round this promise of a "new name."

Abraham and Jacob, in the Old Testament, received new names from God; Peter and the sons of Zebedee in the New Testament, received new names from Christ. In the sad latter day's of the Jewish monarchy, its kings, being deposed by barbarian and pagan conquerors, were reinstated, with new names imposed upon them by the victors. In all these cases the imposition of the new name implies authority and ownership on the part of the giver; and generally a relationship to the giver, with new offices, functions, and powers on the part of the receiver. And so when Christ from the heavens declares that He will rename the conqueror, He asserts, on the one hand, His own absolute authority over him, and, on the other hand, His own perfect knowledge of the nature and inmost being of the creature He names. And, still further, He gives a promise of a nature renewed, of new functions committed to the conqueror, of new spheres, new closeness

of approach to Himself, new capacities, and new powers. Can we go any further? The language of my text warns us that we can go but a little way. But still, reining in fancy, and trying to avoid the temptations of cheap and easy rhetoric and sentimental eloquence which attach to the ordinary treatment of this subject, let me just remind you that there are two things that shine out plain and clear, in the midst of the darkness and vagueness that surround the future glories of the redeemed. The one is their closer relationship to Jesus Christ; the other is their possession, in the ultimate and perfect state, of a body of which the predicates are incorruption, glory, power, and which is a fit organ for the spirit, even as the present corporeal house in which we dwell is an adequate organ for the animal life, and for that alone. And if we hold fast to these two things, the closer proximity to the Lord, and the wondrous new relations into which we may enter with the old Christ, and, on the other hand, the emancipation from the limitations imposed upon will and perception and action by the feeble body, and the possession of an instrument which is up to all the requirements of the immortal spirit, and works in perfect correspondence with it, we can at least see such things as the following.

The "new name" means new vision. We know not how much the flesh, which is the organ of perception for things sensible, is an obscuring, blind, and impenetrable barrier between us and the loftier order of things unseen, in which this little sphere of the material and visible floats,

perishable as a soap-bubble with its iridescent hues. But this we know, that when the stained glass of life is shattered, the white light of Eternity will pour in. And this we know, "Now we see through a glass darkly: then. face to face." By reason of the encompassing flesh, we see but a reflection of the light. According to the great myth of the old Greek philosopher to which Paul, in the words quoted, has put his "Amen," we stand as in a cavern with our back to the light, and we see the shadows reflected passing before the mouth. But then, with the new name and the closer relationship to Jesus Christ, we shall turn ourselves from the reflections and to the light, and shall see face to face.

The "new name" means new activities. We know not how far these fleshly organs, which are the condition of our working upon the outward universe with which they bring us into connection, limit and hem the operations of the spirit. But this we know, that when that which is sown in weakness is raised in power, when that which is sown in corruption is raised in incorruption, when that which is sown in dishonour is raised in glory, we shall then possess an instrument adequate to all that we can ask it to perform; a perfect tool for a perfected spirit. And, just as the fisherman, when he was taken from his nets to be an Apostle, was re-christened, so the saint, who has been working here, down amidst the trivialities of this poor material world, and learning his trade thereby, shall, when he is made a journeyman, and set free from his apprenticeship, be renamed,

in token of larger functions in a nobler sphere, and of wider service with better implements. "His servants shall serve him." The strengths that have been slowly matured here, and the faculties which have been patiently polished and brought to an edge, shall find their true field in work, of sorts unknown, to which perhaps the conditions of space that now hamper us shall be no impediment.

Further, the "new name" means new purity. There are two words very characteristic of this Book of the Apocalypse. One of them is that word of my text, "new"—the "new Jerusalem," "new heavens and a new earth," a "new song," a "new name," and the grand all-comprehensive proclamation, "Behold, I make all things new." The other is "white," not the cold, pallid white that may mean death, but the flashing white, as of sunshine upon snow, the radiant white of purity smitten by Divinity, and so blazing up into lustre that dazzles. There are "white thrones," and "white robes," and "white horses," and all these express one and the same thing, namely, that one element in the newness of the "new name" is spotless purity and supernal radiance. Here, at the best, our whiteness is but blackness washed, and on the road to be cleansed.

The "new name" means new joys, which, in comparison with the gladness of earth, shall be like the difference between the blazing sunshine on an ordinary June day, and the dim transient gleams of an ordinary frosty December day. Here and now, we know joy and sorrow as a

double star, one bright and the other dark, which revolve round one centre, and with terrible swiftness take each other's places. But there, "thou makest them drink of the river of Thy pleasures," and no longer shall we have to speak of them as being—

> Like the snowflakes on the river,
> A moment white, then gone for ever,

but as sealed with the solemn seal of perpetuity, and clarified into the utmost height of purity, and calm with the majesty of a Divine tranquillity after the pattern of His joy, that was full and abode—an undisturbed and changing blessedness.

So, dear friends, new perceptions, new activities, new moral perfectnesses, new gladnesses, these are the elements which, without passing beyond the soberest interpretation of the great promise of my text, we may fairly see shining through it.

II.—I ask you to look, secondly, at the connection between Christ's "new name," and ours.

There is another promise in one of the other letters, which is often read as if it covered the same ground as that of my text, but which in reality is different, though closely connected. In the next chapter we read, in the 12th verse, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the Temple of My God, and I will write upon him"—perhaps we may carry the metaphor of the pillar onwards into this clause, and think of *it* as inscribed with what follows—"the name of My God"—in token of ownership—"the name of the city of My God, which is the 'new Jerusalem'"—in token of citizenship—"and I will write upon him My 'new

name.'" That great promise links itself with that of my text as being the plain ground of it, as will appear if you will give me your attention for a few moments.

What is this "new name" of Christ's? Obviously, remembering the continual use of the word "name" in Scripture, the new name of Jesus is a revelation of His character, nature, and heart; a new manifestation of Himself to the glad eyes of those that loved Him when they saw Him amidst the darkness and the mists of earth, and so have been honoured to see Him more clearly amidst the radiances of the glories of Heaven.

Only remember that when we speak of a "new name" of Christ's as being part of the blessedness of the future state to which we may humbly look forward, there is implied no antiquating of the old name. Nothing will ever make the Cross of Jesus Christ less the centre of the revelation of God than it is to-day. The world sweeps on, and when the great ages of eternity have come, there will sink beneath the horizon of the past many a tall column that stands high and flashes lights from its summit to-day. But no distance onwards, nor any fresh illumination, will ever pale the light that shines from the earthly manifestation and bitter passion of the Christ, the Revealer of God. We antiquate none of that light, because we look for a deeper understanding of what it reveals, when we come to the loftier station of the heavens. And as for earth, so for heaven. The paradox of this Apostle is true, and Christ Himself will say to us then, "Brethren! I write no new commandment unto you, but an old

commandment which ye had from the beginning. Again, a new commandment write I unto you, because the darkness is past and the true light now shineth." The new name is the new name of the old Christ.

Then what is the inscription of that name upon the conqueror? It is not merely the manifestation of the revealed character of Jesus in new beauty, but it is the manifestation of His ownership of His servants by their transformation into His likeness, which transformation is the consequence of their new vision of Him. "I will write upon him My new name" is but saying in other words, "The new revelation of My character, which he shall receive, will be stamped upon his character, and he shall become like Myself." It is but putting into picturesque form what this same Apostle said in more abstract words when he declared, "When He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Here we see Him as He has become for our sins, and the imperfect vision partially works likeness; there seeing Him as He is, we become as He is. The name is inscribed upon the beholder as the sun makes an image of itself on the photographic plate. If thou wouldest see Christ, thou must be as Christ; if thou wouldest be as Christ, thou must see Christ. "We all, with unveiled faces, mirroring as a glass does the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image."

So, then, our "name" is Christ's new name stamped upon us. On the day of the bridal of the Lamb and the Church, the bride takes her

Husband's name, and all who love Him and pass into His sweet presence in the Heavens, are named by His new name because they partake of His life. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and Christ's name is his name.

III.—Again, notice, in the third place, the blessed secret of this new name.

"No man knoweth it save He that receiveth it." Of course not. There is only one way to know the highest things in human experience, and that is by possessing them. Nobody can describe love, sorrow, gladness, so as to awaken a clear conception of them in hearts that have never experienced them. And so poetry goes side by side with man through the ages, and is always foiled in its efforts, and feels that it has not yet reached the heart of the mystery that it tries to speak. Its words awaken *memories* in those only who have already known the things, and you can no more impart a knowledge of the deepest human experiences to men who have not experienced them than you can describe an odour or a taste. That is eminently true about religion, and it is most of all true about that perfect future state.

"No man knoweth it saving he that receiveth it." Well, then, when we go one inch beyond the utterances of Him that does know—that is, Jesus Christ—then we get into dreams and errors. And we can no more conceive that future life, apart from the utterances of our Lord, either from His own lips or through His inspired servants, than an unborn child can construct a picture of the world that it has never seen. A chrysalis, lying under

ground, would know about as much of what it would be like when it had got its wings and lived upon sweetness, and flashed in the sunshine, as a man when he lets his imagination attempt to construct a picture of another life. I abjure all such. I try to speak plain inferences from manifest certitudes of Scripture. And I beseech you to remember that for us the curtain is the picture, and that the more detailed and precise descriptions of that future life are, whether in popular religious books or elsewhere, the more sure they are to be wrong. Death keeps his secret well, and we have to pass his threshold before we know what lies beyond.

But more than that. That same blessed mystery lies round about the name of each individual possessor, to all but himself. That sounds a questionable joy. We know how sad it is to be unable to speak our deepest selves to our dearest ones, and feel as if no small part of that future blessedness lay in the thought of the power of absolute self-impartation down to the very roots of our being. And I do not think that my text denies that. The New Testament teaches us that the redeemed shall "be manifested," and shall be able, therefore, to reveal themselves to the very secret foundations of their being. And yet each eye shall see its own rainbow, and each will possess in happy certitude of individual possession a honeyed depth of sweet experience which, after all glad revelation, will remain unrevealed, the basis of the being, the deep foundation of the blessedness. Just as we shall know Christ perfectly, and bear His new name

inscribed upon our foreheads, and yet *He* has "a name which no man knoweth but He Himself," so the mystery of each redeemed soul will still remain impenetrable to others. But it will be a mystery of no painful darkness, nor making any barrier between ourselves and the saints whom we love.

Rather it is the guarantee of an infinite variety in the manner of possessing the one name. All the surrounding diamonds that are set about the central blaze shall catch the light on their facets, and from one it will come golden, and from another violet, and another red, and another flashing and pure white. Each glorified spirit shall reveal Christ, and yet the one Christ shall be manifested in infinite variety of forms, and the total summing up of the many reflections will be the image of the whole Lord. As the old Rabbis named the angels that stood round the Throne of God by divers names, expressive of the divers forms which the one Divine presence assumed to them, and called one Gabriel, "God, my strength"; and another Uriel, "God, my light"; and another Raphael, "God, the Healer"; and another Michael, "Who is like God?" so, as we stand about the Christ, we shall diversely manifest His one glory, one after this manner and another after that.

IV.—Lastly, note the giving of the new name to the victors.

The language of my text involves two things: "To him that overcometh," lays down the conditions; "Will I give," lays down the cause of the

possession of the "new name"—that is to say, this renovation of the being, and efflorescence into new knowledges, activities, perfections, and joy is only possible on condition of the earthly life of obedience and service and conquest. It is no arbitrary bestowment of a title. The conqueror gets the name that embodies his victories, and without conquering a man cannot receive it. It is not dying that fits a man for heaven, or makes it possible for God to give it him. God would give it him if He could, but God cannot. The limitation, inseparable from His being, and from the nature of the gift, lies here—"To him that overcometh," and only to him, "will I give." The name corresponds to the reality, and in heaven men are called what they are.

But while the conquering life here is the condition of the gift, it is none the less a gift. That heavenly blessedness is not the necessary consequence of earthly faithfulness. It is not a case of evolution, but of bestowal by God's free love in Christ. The power by which we conquer is His gift. The life which He crowns is His gift, and when He crowns it, it is His own grace in it which He crowns. "The gift of God is eternal life."

So, my friends, here is the all-important truth for us all. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"; and that faith is victorious in idea and germ, as soon as it begins to abide in a man's heart. If he were to die the moment after having yielded himself to Christ in faith, he would be a victor, and

capable of the crown which God will give to those who overcome, whether they have fought for the twelve hours of the conflict or but for a moment at its close. This great promise is held out to each of us. It opens before us the sure prospect of blessedness, progress, power and joy, shoreless and infinite, unspeakable after all speech, and certain as yesterday. Either that prospect is before us or its dark opposite. We shall either conquer by Christ's faith and in Christ's strength and so receive His Divine name, or else be beaten by the world and the flesh and the devil, and so bear the image of our conquerors. I beseech you, make your choice that you will be of those who, having got the victory over the beast and his image and the number of his name, stand at last on the sea of glass with the harps of God, and sing a song of thanksgiving to Him by whom they have overcome, and whose image and name they bear.

XXII.

"The Heavenly Vision."

"Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."—ACTS xxvi. 19.

THIS is Paul's account of the decisive moment in his life on which all his own future, and a great deal of the future of Christianity and of the world, hung. The gracious voice had spoken from heaven, and now everything depended on the answer made in the heart of the man lying there blind and amazed. Will he rise melted by love, and softened into submission, or hardened by resistance to the call of the exalted Lord? The somewhat singular expression, which he employs in the text, makes us spectators of the very process of his yielding. For it might be rendered, with perhaps an advantage, "I *became* not disobedient"; as if the "disobedience" was the prior condition, from which we see him in the very act of passing, by the melting of his nature and the yielding of his will. Surely there have been few decisions in the world's history big with larger destinies than that which the captive

described to Agrippa in the simple words: "I became not disobedient to the heavenly vision."

I.—Note, then, first, that this heavenly vision shines for us too.

Paul throughout his whole career looked back to the miraculous appearance of Jesus Christ in the heavens, as being equally available as valid ground for his Christian convictions as were the appearances of the Lord in bodily form to the eleven after His resurrection. And I may venture to work the parallel in the inverse direction, and to say to you that what we see and know of Jesus Christ is as valid a ground for our convictions, and as true and powerful a call for our obedience, as when the heaven was rent, and the glory above the mid-day sun bathed the persecutor and his followers on the stony road to Damascus. For the revelation that is made to the understanding and the heart, to the spirit and the will, is the same whether it be made, as it was to Paul, through a heavenly vision, or, as it was to the other Apostles, through the facts of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, which their senses certified to them or, as it is to us, by the record of the same facts, permanently enshrined in Scripture. Paul's sight of Christ was for a moment; we can see Him as often and as long as we will, by turning to the pages of this Book. Paul's sight of Christ was accompanied with but a partial apprehension of the great and far-reaching truths which he was to learn and to teach, as embodied in the Lord whom he saw. To see Him was the work of a moment, to "know

Him" was the effort of a lifetime. We have the abiding results of the life-long process lying ready to our hands in Paul's own letters, and we have not only the permanent record of Christ in the Gospels instead of the transient vision in the heavens, and the unfolding of the meaning and bearings of the historical facts, in the authoritative teaching of the Epistles, but we have also, in the history of the Church founded on these, in the manifest workings of a Divine power for and through the company of believers, as well as in the correspondence between the facts and doctrines of Christianity and the wants of humanity, a vision disclosed and authenticated as heavenly, more developed, fuller of meaning and more blessed to the eyes which see it than was poured upon the persecutor as he reeled from his horse on the way to the great city.

Dear brethren, they who see Christ in the word, in the history of the world, in the pleading of the preacher, in the course of the ages; and who sometimes hear His voice in the warnings which He breathes into their consciences, and in the illuminations which he flashes on their understanding, need ask for no loftier, no more valid and irrefragable manifestion of His gracious self. To each of us this vision is granted. May I say, without seeming egotism, to you it is granted even through the dark and cloudy envelope of my poor words?

II.—The vision of Christ, howsoever perceived, comes demanding obedience.

The purpose for which Jesus Christ made Him-

self known to Paul was to give him a charge which should influence his whole life. And the manner in which the Lord, when He had appeared, prepared the way for the charge was twofold. He revealed Himself in His radiant glory, in His exalted being, in His sympathetic and mysterious unity with them that loved Him and trusted Him, in His knowledge of the doings of the persecutor; and He disclosed to Saul the inmost evil that lurked in his own heart, and showed him, to his bewilderment and confusion, how the thing that he thought to be righteousness and service was blasphemy and sin. So by the manifestion of Himself enthroned omniscient, bound by the closest ties of identity and of sympathy with all that love Him, and by the disclosure of the amazed gazer's evil and sin, Jesus Christ opened the way for the charge which bore in its very heart an assurance of pardon, and was itself a manifestation of His love.

In like manner all heavenly visions are meant to secure human obedience. We have not done what God means us to do with any knowledge of Him which He grants, unless we utilise it to drive the wheels of life and carry it out into practice in our daily conduct. Revelation is not meant to satisfy mere curiosity or the idle desire to know. It shines above us like the stars, but, unlike them, it shines to be the guide of our lives. And whatsoever glimpse of the Divine nature, or of Christ's love, nearness, and power, we have ever caught, was meant to bow our wills in glad submission, and to animate our hands for diligent service and

to quicken our feet to run in the way of His commandments.

There is plenty of idle gazing, with more or less of belief, at the heavenly vision. I beseech you to lay to heart this truth, that Christ rends the heavens and shows us God, not that men may know, but that men may, knowing, do; and all His visions are the bases of His commandment. So the question for us all is, What are we doing with what we know of Jesus Christ? Nothing? Have we translated our thoughts of Him into actions, and have we put all our actions under control by our thoughts of Him? It is not enough that a man should say, "whereupon I *saw* the vision," or, "whereupon I was *convinced* of the vision," or, "whereupon I *understood* the vision." Sight, apprehension, theology, orthodoxy, they are all very well, but the right result is, "whereupon I was *not disobedient* to the Heavenly vision." And unless your knowledge of Christ makes you do, and keep from doing, a thousand things, it is only an idle vision, which adds to your guilt.

But notice, in this connection, the peculiarity of the obedience which the vision requires. There is not a word in this story of Paul's conversion about the thing which Paul himself always puts in the foreground as the very hinge upon which conversion turns—viz., faith. Not a word. The name is not here, but the thing is here, if people will look. For the obedience which Paul says that he rendered to the vision was not rendered with his hands. He got up to his feet on the road there, "not disobedient," though he had not done a

thing. This is to say, the man's will had melted. It had all gone with a run, so to speak, and the inmost being of him was subdued. The obedience was the submission of self to God, and not the more or less diligent and continuous consequent external activity in the way of God's commandments. Further, Paul's obedience is also an obedience based upon the vision of Jesus Christ enthroned, living, bound by ties, that thrill at the slightest touch, to every heart that loves Him and making common cause with him.

And, furthermore, it is an obedience based upon the shuddering recognition of Paul's own unsuspected evil and foulness, how all the life, that he had thought was being built up into a temple that God would inhabit, was rottenness and falsehood. And it is an obedience, further, built upon the recognition of pity and pardon in Christ, who, after His sharp denunciation of the sin, looks down from heaven with a smile of forgiveness upon His lips, and says: "But rise and stand upon thy feet, for I will send thee to make known My name."

An obedience which is the inward yielding of the will, which is all built upon the revelation of the living Christ, Who was dead and is alive for evermore, and close to all His followers; and is, further, the thankful tribute of a heart that knows itself to be sinful, and is certain that it is forgiven—what is that but the obedience which is of faith? And thus, when I say the heavenly vision demands obedience, I do not mean that Christ shows Himself to you to set you to work, but I

mean that Christ shows Himself to you, that you may yield yourselves to Him, and in the act may receive power to do all His sweet and sacred will.

III.—Thirdly, this obedience is in our own power to give or to withhold.

Paul, as I said in my introductory remarks, puts us here as spectators of the very act of submission. He shows it to us in its beginning—he shows us the state from which he came and that into which he passed, and he tells us, "I *became* not disobedient." In his case it was a complete, swift and permanent revolution, as if some thick-ribbed ice should all at once melt into sweet water. But whether swift or slow, it was his doing, and after the Voice had spoken it was possible that Paul should have resisted, and risen from the ground, not a servant, but a persecutor still. For God's grace constrains no man, and there is always the possibility open that when He calls we refuse, and that when He beseeches we say "I will not."

There is the mystery on which the subtlest intellects have tasked their powers and blunted the edge of their keenness in all generations; and it is not going to be settled in five minutes of a sermon of mine. But the practical point that I have to urge is simply this: there are two mysteries, the one that men *can*, and the other that men *do*, resist Christ's pleading voice. As to the former, we cannot fathom it. But do not let any difficulty deaden to you the clear voice of one's own consciousness. If I cannot trust my sense that I can do this thing or not do it, as I choose, there is

nothing that I can trust. Will is the power of determining which of two roads I shall go, and, strange as it is, incapable of statement in any more general terms than the reiteration of the fact; yet here stands the fact, that God, the infinite Will, yet has given to men, whom He made in His own image, this inexplicable and awful power of coinciding with or opposing His purposes and His voice.

"Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine."

For the other mystery is, that men *do* consciously set themselves against the will of God, and refuse the gifts which they know all the while are for their good. It is no use to say that sin is ignorance. No; that is only a surface explanation. You and I know too well that many a time when we have been as sure of what God wanted us to do as if we had seen it written in flaming letters on the sky there, we have gone and done the exact opposite. I know that there are men and women who are convinced in their inmost souls that they ought to be Christians, and that Jesus Christ is pleading with them at the present hour, and yet in whose hearts there is no yielding to what, they yet are certain, is the will and voice of Jesus Christ.

IV.—Lastly, this obedience may, in a moment, revolutionize a life.

Paul rode from Jerusalem breathing out threatenings and slaughters. He fell from his war horse, a persecutor of Christians, and a bitter enemy of Jesus. A few moments pass

There was one moment in which the crucial decision was made; and he staggered to his feet, loving all that he had hated, and abandoning all in which he had trusted. His own doctrine, that "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away and all things are become new" is but a generalization of what befell himself on the Damascus road. It is no use trying to say that there had been a warfare going on in this man's mind long before, of which his complete capitulation was only the final visible outcome. There is not a trace of anything of the kind in the story. It is a pure hypothesis pressed into the service of the anti-supernatural explanation of the story.

There are plenty of analogies of such sudden and entire revolution. All reformation of a moral kind is best done quickly. It is a very hopeless task, as everybody knows, to tell a drunkard to break off his habits gradually. There must be one moment in which he definitely turns himself round and sets his face in the other direction. Some things are best done with slow, continuous pressure; other things need to be done with a wrench if they are to be done at all.

There used to be far too much insistance upon one type of religious experience, and all men that were to be recognised as Christians were, by Evangelical Nonconformists, required to be able to point to the moment when, by some sudden change, they passed from darkness to light. We have drifted away from that very far now, and there is need for insisting, not upon the necessity, but upon the

possibility of sudden conversions. However some may try to show that such experiences cannot be, the experience of every earnest Christian teacher can answer—well! whether they can be or not, they are. Jesus Christ cured two men gradually, and all the others instantaneously. No doubt, for young people who have been born amidst Christian influences, and have grown up in Christian households, the usual way of becoming Christians is that slowly and imperceptibly they shall pass into the consciousness of communion with Jesus Christ. But for people who have grown up irreligious and, perhaps, profligate and sinful, the most probable way is a sudden stride out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. So I come to you all, with this message. No matter what your past, no matter how much of your life may have ebbed away, no matter how deeply rooted and obstinate may be your habits of evil, no matter how often you may have tried to mend yourself and have failed, it is possible by one swift act of surrender to break the chains and go free. In every man's life there have been moments into which years have been crowded, and which have put a wider gulf between his past and his present self than many slow, languid hours can dig. A great sorrow, a great joy, a great, newly-discerned truth, a great resolve will make "one day as a thousand years." Men live through such moments and feel that the past is swallowed up as by an earthquake. The highest instance of thus making time elastic and crowding it with meaning is when a man forms

and keeps the swift resolve to yield himself to Christ. It may be the work of a moment, but it makes a gulf between past and future, like that which parted the time before and the time after that in which "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." If you have never yet bowed before the heavenly vision and yielded yourself as conquered by the love which pardons, to be the glad servant of the Lord Jesus who takes all His servants into wondrous oneness with Himself, do it now. You can. Delay is disobedience, and may be death. Do it now, and your whole life will be changed. Peace and joy and power will come to you, and you, made a new man, will move in a new world of new relations, duties, energies, loves, gladnesses, helps, and hopes. If you take heed to prolong the point into a line, and hour by hour to renew the surrender and the cry "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" you will ever have the vision of the Christ enthroned, pardoning, sympathising, and commanding, which will fill your sky with glory, point the path of your feet, and satisfy your gaze with His beauty, and your heart with His all-sufficing and ever-present love.

XXIII.

The Threefold Common Heritage.

"I, John, your brother, and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus."—REV. i. 9 (Revised Version).

O does the Apostle introduce himself to his readers; with no word of pre-eminence or of apostolic authority, but with the simple claim to share with them in their Christian heritage. And this is the same man who, at an earlier stage of his Christian life, desired that he and his brother might "sit on Thy right hand and on Thy left in Thy Kingdom." What a change had passed over him! What was it that out of such timber made such a polished shaft? I think there is only one answer—the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of God's good Spirit that came after it.

It almost looks as if John was thinking about his old ambitious wish, and our Lord's answer to it, when he wrote these words; for the very gist of our Lord's teaching to him on that memorable occasion is reproduced in compressed form in my text. He had been taught that fellowship in

Christ's sufferings must go before participation in His throne; and so here he puts tribulation before the kingdom. He had been taught, in answer to his foolish request, that pre-eminence was not the first thing to think of, but service; and that the only principle according to which rank was determined in that kingdom was service. So here he says nothing about dignity, but calls himself simply a brother and companion. He humbly suppresses his apostolic authority, and takes his place, not by the side of the throne, apart from others, but down among them.

Now, the Revised Version is distinctly an improved version in its rendering of these words. It reads "partaker with you," instead of "companion," and so emphasizes the notion of participation. It reads, "in the tribulation and kingdom and patience," instead of "in tribulation and *in the* kingdom and patience"; and so, as it were, brackets all the three nouns together under one preposition and one definite article, and thus shows more closely their connection. And instead of "in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ," it reads, "which are in Jesus Christ," and so shows that the predicate, "in Christ Jesus," extends to all the three—the "tribulation," the "kingdom," and the "patience," and not only to the last of the three, as would be suggested to an ordinary reader of our English version. So that we have here a participation by all Christian men in three things, all of which are, in some sense, "in Christ Jesus." Note that participation in "the kingdom" stands in the centre, buttressed, as it were, on the one side

by participation "in the tribulation," and on the other side by participation "in the patience." We may, then, best bring out the connection and force of these thoughts by looking at the common royalty, the common road leading to it, and the common temper in which the road is trodden—all which things do inhere in Christ, and may be ours on condition of our union with Him.

I.—So then, first, note the common royalty. "I, John, am a partaker with you in the kingdom."

Now John does not say, "I am *going to be* a partaker," but says, "Here and now, in this little rocky island of Patmos, an exile and all but a martyr, I yet, like all the rest of you, who have the same *weird* to dree, and the same bitter cup to drink, even now *am* a partaker of the kingdom that is in Christ."

What is that kingdom? It is the sphere or society, the state or realm, in which His will is obeyed; and, as we may say, His writs run. His kingdom, in the deepest sense of the word, is only there, where loving hearts yield, and where His will is obeyed consciously, because the conscious obedience is rooted in love.

But then, besides that, there is a wider sense of the expression, in which Christ's kingdom stretches all through the universe, and wherever the authority of God is, there is the kingdom of the exalted Christ, who is the right hand and active power of God.

So then the "kingdom that is in Christ" is yours if you are "in Christ." Or, to put it into other

words, whoever is ruled *by* Christ has a share in rule *with* Christ. Hence the words in the context here, to which a double meaning may be attached, "He hath made us to be a kingdom." We are His kingdom in so far as our wills joyfully and lovingly submit to His authority; and then, in so far as we are His kingdom, we are kings. So far as our wills bow to and own His sway, they are invested with power to govern ourselves and others. His subjects are the world's masters. Even now, in the midst of confusions and rebellions, and apparent contradictions, the true rule in the world belongs to the men and women who bow to the authority of Jesus Christ. Whoever worships Him, saying, "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ," receives from Him the blessed assurance, "and I appoint unto you a kingdom." His vassals are altogether princes. He is "King of kings," not only in the sense that He is higher than the kings of the earth, but also in the sense, though it be no part of the true meaning of the expression, that those whom He rules are, by the very submission to His rule, elevated to royal dignity.

We rule over ourselves, which is the best kingdom to govern, on condition of saying:—"Lord! I cannot rule myself; do Thou rule me." When we put the reins into His hands, when we put our consciences into His keeping, when we take our law from His gentle and yet sovereign lips, when we let Him direct our thinking; when His word is absolute truth that ends all controversy, and when His will is the supreme authority that puts an end to every hesitation and reluctance, then we are

masters of ourselves. The man that has rule over his own spirit is the true king. He that thus is Christ's man is his own master. Being lords of ourselves, and having our foot upon our passions, and conscience and will flexible in His hand and yielding to His lightest touch, as a fine-mouthed horse does to the least pressure of the bit, then we are masters of circumstances and the world; and all things are on our side if we are on Christ's side.

So we do not need to wait for Heaven to be heirs, that is possessors, of the kingdom that God hath prepared for them that love Him. Christ's dominion is shared even now and here by all who serve Him. It is often hard for us to believe this about ourselves or others, especially when toil weighs upon us, and adverse circumstances, against which we have vainly striven, tyrannise over our lives. We feel more like powerless victims than lords of the world. Our lives seem concerned with such petty trivialities, and so absolutely lorded over by externals, that to talk of a present dominion over a present world seems irony, flatly contradicted by facts. We are tempted to throw forward the realisation of our regality to the future. We are heirs, indeed, of a great kingdom, but for the present are set to keep a small huckster's shop in a back street. So we faithlessly say to ourselves; and we need to open our eyes, as John would have his brethren do, to the fact of the present participation of every Christian, in the present kingdom of the enthroned Christ. There can be no more startling anomalies in our lots than were in his, as he sat there in

Patmos, a solitary exile, weighed upon with many cares, ringed about with perils not a few. But in them all he knew his share in the kingdom to be real and inalienable, and yielding much for present fruition, however much more remained over for hope and future possession. The kingdom is not only "of" but "in" Jesus Christ. He is, as it were, the sphere in which it is realised. If we are "in Him" by that faith which engrafts us into Him, we shall ourselves both be and possess that kingdom, and *possess* it, because we *are* it.

But, while the kingdom is present, its perfect form is future. The crown of righteousness is laid up for God's people, even though they are already a kingdom, and already (according to the true reading of Rev. v. 10) "reign upon the earth." Great hopes, the greater for their dimness, gather round that future when the faithfulness of the steward shall be exchanged for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for the joy of the Lord. The presumptuous ambition of John in his early request did not sin by setting his hopes too high; for, much as he asked when he sought a place at the right hand of his Master's throne, his wildest dreams fell far below the reality, reserved for all who overcome, of a share in that very throne itself. There is room there, not for one or two of the aristocracy of heaven, but for all the true servants of Christ.

They used to say that in the days of the first Napoleon every French soldier carried a field-marshal's baton in his knapsack. That is to say, every one of them had the chance of winning it,

and many of them did win it. But every Christian soldier carries a crown in his, and that not because he perhaps may, but because he certainly will, wear it, when the war is over, if he stands by his flag, and because he has it already in actual possession, though for the present the helmet becomes his brow rather than the diadem. On such themes we can say little, only let us remember that the present and the future life of the Christian are distinguished, not by the one possessing the royalty which the other wants, but as the partial and perfect forms of the same Kingdom, which, in both forms alike, depends on our true abiding in Him. That kingdom is *in* Him, and is the common heritage of all who are in Him, and who, on earth and in heaven, possess it in degrees varying accurately with the measure in which they are in Christ, and He in them.

II.—Note, secondly, the common road to that common royalty.

As I have remarked, the kingdom is the central thought here, and the other two stand on either side as subsidiary: on the one hand, a common "tribulation"; on the other, a common "patience." The former is the path, by which all have to travel who attain the royalty; the latter is the common temper, in which all the travellers must face the steepnesses and roughnesses of the road.

"Tribulation" has, no doubt, primarily reference to actual persecution, such as had sent John to his exile in Patmos, and hung like a threatening thunder-cloud over the Asiatic churches. But the significance of the word is not exhausted thereby.

It is always true that "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." All who are bound to the same place, and who start from the same place must go by the same road. There are no short cuts nor bye-paths for the Christian pilgrim. The only way to the kingdom that is in Christ is the road which He Himself trod. There is "tribulation in Christ," as surely as in Him there are peace and victory, and if we are in Christ we shall be sure to get our share of it. The Christian course brings new difficulties and trials of its own, and throws those who truly out-and-out adopt it into relations with the world which will surely lead to oppositions and pains. If we are in the world as Christ was, we shall have to make up our minds to share "the reproach of Christ" until Egypt owns Him and not Pharaoh for its King. If there be no such experience, it is much more probable that the reason for exemption is the Christian's worldliness than the world's growing Christlikeness.

No doubt the grosser forms of persecution are at an end, and no doubt multitudes of nominal Christians live on most amicable terms with the world, and know next to nothing of the tribulation that is in Christ. But that is not because there is any real alteration in the consequences of union with Jesus, but because their union is so very slight and superficial. The world "loves its own," and what can it find to hate in the shoals of people, whose religion is confined to their tongues mostly, and has next to nothing to do with their lives? It has not ceased to be a hard thing to be a real and

thorough Christian. A great deal in the world is against us when we try to be so, and a great deal in ourselves is against us. There will be "tribulation" by reason of self-denial, and the mortification and rigid suppression or regulation of habits, tastes, and passions, which some people may be able to indulge, but which we must cast out, though dear and sensitive as a right eye, if they interfere with our entrance into life. The law is unrepealed—"If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him."

But this participation in the tribulation that is in Christ has another and gentler aspect. The expression points to the blessed softening of our hardest trials when they are borne in union with the Man of Sorrows. The sunniest lives have their dark times. Sooner or later we all have to lay our account with hours when the heart bleeds and hope dies, and we shall not find strength to bear such times aright, unless we bear them in union with Jesus Christ, by which our darkest sorrows are turned into the tribulation that is in Him, and all the bitterness, or, at least, the poison of the bitterness, taken out of them, and they almost changed into a solemn joy. Egypt would be as barren as the desert which bounds it, were it not for the rising of the Nile; so when the cold waters of sorrow rise up and spread over our hearts, if we are Christians, they will leave a precious deposit when they retire, on which will grow rich harvests. Some edible plants are not fit for use till they have had a touch of frost. Christian character wants the same treatment.

It is needful for us that the road to the kingdom should often run through the valley of weeping. Our being in the kingdom depends upon the bending of our wills in submission to the King; then surely nothing should be more welcome to us, as nothing can be more needful, than anything which bends them, even if the fire which makes their obstinacy pliable, and softens the iron so that it runs in the appointed mould, should have to be very hot. The soil of the vineyards on the slopes of Vesuvius is disintegrated lava. The richest grapes, from which a precious wine is made, grow on the product of eruptions which tore the mountain side and darkened all the sky. So our costliest graces of character are grown in a heart enriched by losses and made fertile by convulsions which rent it and covered smiling verdure with what seemed at first a fiery flood of ruin. The kingdom is reached by the road of tribulation. Blessed are they for whom the universal sorrows which flesh is heir to become helps heavenwards because they are borne in union with Jesus, and so hallowed into "tribulation that is in Him."

III.—We note the common temper in which the common road to the common royalty is to be trodden.

"Tribulation" refers to circumstances—"patience" to disposition. We shall certainly meet with tribulation if we are Christians, and if we are, we shall front tribulation with patience. Both are equally, though in different ways, characteristics of all the true travellers to the kingdom. Patience is the link, so to speak, between the kingdom and

the tribulation. Sorrow does not of itself lead to the possession of the kingdom. All depends on the disposition which the sorrow evokes, and the way in which it is borne. We may take our sorrows in such a fashion as to be driven by them out of our submission to Christ, and so they may lead us away from and not towards the kingdom. The worst affliction is an affliction wasted, and every affliction is wasted, unless it is met with patience, and that in Christ Jesus. Many a man is soured, or paralysed, or driven from his faith, or drowned in self-absorbed and self-compassionating regret, or otherwise harmed by his sorrows, and the only way to get the real good of them is to keep closely united to our Lord, that in Him we may have patience as well as peace.

Most of us know that the word here translated "patience" means a great deal more than the passive endurance which we usually mean by that word, and distinctly includes the notion of active perseverance. That active element is necessarily implied, for instance, in the exhortation, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Mere uncomplaining passive endurance is not the temper which leads to running any race. It simply bears and does nothing, but the persistent effort of the runner with tense muscles calls for more than patience. A vivid metaphor underlies the word—that of the fixed attitude of one bearing up a heavy weight or pressure without yielding or being crushed. Such immovable constancy is more than passive. There must be much active exercise of power to prevent collapse. But all the

strength is not to be exhausted in the effort to bear without flinching. There should be enough remaining for work that remains over and above the sorrow. The true Christian patience implies continuance in well-doing, besides meek acceptance of tribulation. The first element in it is, no doubt, unmurmuring acquiescence in whatsoever affliction from God or man beats against us on our path. But the second is, continual effort after Christian progress, notwithstanding the tribulation. The storm must not blow us out of our course. We must still "bear up and steer right onward," in spite of all its force on our faces, or, as "birds of tempest-loving kind" do, so spread our pinions as to be helped by it towards our goal.

Do I address anyone who has to stagger along the Christian course under some heavy and, perhaps, hopeless load of sorrow? There is a plain lesson for all of us in such circumstances. It is not less my duty to seek to grow in grace and Christlikeness because I am sad. That is my first business at all times and under all changes of fortune and mood. My sorrows are meant to help me to that, and if they so absorb me that I am indifferent to the obligation of Christian progress, then my patience, however stoical and uncomplaining it may be, is not the "perseverance that is in Christ Jesus." Nor does tribulation absolve from plain duties. Poor Mary of Bethany sat still in the house, with her hands lying idly in her lap, and her regrets busy with the most unprofitable of all occupations—fancying how different all

would have been if one thing had been different. Sorrow is excessive or misdirected and selfish, and therefore hurtful, when for the sake of indulgence in it we fling up plain tasks. The glory of the kingdom shining athwart the gloom of the tribulation should help us to be patient, and the patience, laying hold of the tribulation by the right handle, should convert it into a blessing and an instrument for helping us to a fuller possession of the kingdom.

This temper of brave and active persistence in the teeth of difficulties will only be found where these other two are found—in Christ. The stem from which that three-leaved plant grows must be rooted in Him. He is the King, and in Him abiding, we have our share of the common royalty. He is the forerunner and pathfinder, and, abiding in Him, we tread the common path to the common kingdom, which is hallowed at every rough place by the print of His bleeding feet. He is the leader and perfecter of faith, and, abiding in Him, we receive some breath of the spirit which was in Him, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame. Abiding in Him, we shall possess in our measure all which is in Him, and find ourselves partakers with an innumerable company "in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Christ Jesus," and may hope to hear at last, "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me."

XXIV.

Anathema and Grace.

The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus."—1 Cor. xvi. 21-24.

ERROR and tenderness are strangely mingled in this parting salutation, which was added to the letter written by an amanuensis, in the great characters shaped by Paul's own hand. He has been obliged, throughout the whole epistle, to assume a tone of remonstrance abundantly mingled with irony and sarcasm and indignation. He has had to rebuke the Corinthians for many faults, party spirit, lax morality, toleration of foul sins, grave abuses in their worship even at the Lord's Supper, gross errors in opinion in the denial of the Resurrection. And in this last solemn warning he traces all these vices to their fountain-head—the defect of love to Jesus Christ—and warns of their fatal issue. "Let him be Anathema."

But he will not leave these terrible words for his last. The thunder is followed by gentle rain, and

the sun glistens on the dewdrops. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." Nor for himself will he let the last impression be one of rebuke or even of warning. He desires to show that his heart yearns over them all; so he gathers them all—the partisans; the poor brother that has fallen into sin; the lax ones who, in their misplaced tenderness, had left him in his sin; the misguided reasoners who had struck the Resurrection out of the articles of the Christian creed—he gathers them all into his final salutation, and he says, "Take and share my love—though I have had to rebuke—amongst the whole of you."

Is not that beautiful? And does not the juxtaposition of such messages in this farewell go deeper than the revelation of Paul's character? May we not see, in these terrible and tender thoughts thus inextricably intertwined and braided together, a revelation of the true nature both of the terror and the tenderness of the Gospel which Paul preached? It is from that point of view that I want to look at them now.

I.—I take first that thought, the terror of the fate of the unloving.

Now, I must ask you for a moment's attention in regard of these two untranslated words, *Anathema Maran-atha.* The first thing to be noticed is that the latter of them stands independently of the former, and forms a sentence by itself, as I shall have to show you presently. "*Anathema*" means an offering, or *a thing devoted*; and its use in the New Testament arises from its use in the Greek translation of the Old

Testament, where it is employed for persons and things that, in a peculiar sense, were set apart and devoted to God. In the story of the conquest of Canaan, for instance, we read of Jericho and other places, persons, or things that were, as our version somewhat unfortunately renders it, "accursed," or as it ought rather to be rendered, "devoted," or put under a ban. And this "devotion" was of such a sort as that the things or persons devoted were doomed to destruction. All the dreadful things that were done in the conquest were the consequences of the persons that endured them being thus "consecrated," in a very dreadful sense, or set apart for God. The underlying idea was that evil things brought into contact with Him were necessarily destroyed with a swift destruction. That being the meaning of the word, it is clear that its use in my text is distinctly metaphorical, and that it suggests to us that the unloving, like those cities full of uncleanness, when they are brought into contact with the infinite love of the coming Judge, shrivel up and are destroyed.

The other word, "Maran-atha," as I said, is to be taken as a separate sentence. It belongs to the dialect which was probably the vernacular of Palestine in the time of Paul, and to which belong, for the most part, the other untranslated words that are scattered up and down the Gospels, such as "Aceldama," "Eph-pha-tha," and the like. It means "our Lord comes." Why Paul chose to use that untranslated scrap of another tongue in a letter to a Gentile Church we cannot tell

Perhaps it had come to be a kind of watchword amongst the early Jewish Christians, which came naturally to his lips. But, at any rate, the use of it here is distinctly to confirm the warning of the previous clause, by pointing to the time at which that warning shall be fulfilled. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be devoted and destroyed. Our Lord comes." The only other thing to be noticed by way of introduction is that this first clause is not an imprecation, nor any wish on the part of the Apostle, but is a solemn prophetic warning (acquiesced in by every righteous heart) of that which will certainly come. The significance of the whole may be gathered into one simple sentence—the coming of the Lord of Love is the destruction of the unloving.

"Our Lord comes." Paul's Christianity gathered round two facts and moments—one in the past, Christ has come; one in the future, Christ will come. For memory, the coming by the cradle and the Cross; for hope, the coming on His throne in glory; and between these two moments, like the solid piers of a suspension bridge, the frail structure of the present hangs swinging. In this day men have lost their expectation of the one, and to a large extent their faith in the other. But we shall not understand Scripture unless we seek to make as prominent in our thoughts as on its pages that second coming as the complement and necessary issue of the first. It stands stamped on every line. It colours all the New Testament views of life. It is used as a motive for every duty, and as a magnet to draw men to Jesus Christ by

salutary dread. There is no hint in my text about the time of the Lord's coming, no disturbing of the solemnity of the thought by non-essential details of chronology, so we may dismiss these from our minds. The fact is the same, and has the same force as a motive upon life, whether it is to be fulfilled in the next moment or thousands of years hence, provided only that you and I are to be there when He comes.

There have been many comings in the past, besides the comings in the flesh. The days of the Lord that have already appeared in the history of the world are not few. One characteristic is stamped upon them all, and that is the swift annihilation of what is opposed to Him. The Bible has a set of standing metaphors by which to illustrate this thought of the Coming of the Lord—"a flood," "a harvest" when the ears are ripe for the sickle, the waking of God from slumber, and the like; all suggesting similar thoughts. *The* day of the Lord, *the* coming of the Lord, will include and surpass all the characteristics which these lesser and premonitory judgment days presented in miniature. I do not enlarge on this theme. I would not play the orator about it if I could; but I appeal to your consciences, which, in the case of most of us, not only testify of right and wrong, but of responsibility, and suggest a Judge to whom we are responsible. And I urge on each, and on myself, this simple question: Have I allowed its due weight on my life and character to that watchword of the ancient church—*Maran-atha*, "our Lord cometh"?

Now, the coming of the Lord of Love is the annihilation of the unloving. The destruction implied in Anathema does not mean the cessation of Being, but a death which is worse than death, because it is a death in life. Suppose a man with all his past annihilated, with all its effort foiled and crushed, with all its possessions evaporated and disappeared, and with his memory and his conscience stung into clear-sighted activity, so as that he looks back upon his former self and into his present self, and feels that it is all waste and chaos, would not that fulfil the word of my text—"Let him be Anathema"? And suppose that such a man, in addition to these thoughts, and as the root and the source of them, had ever the quivering consciousness that he was and must be in the presence of an unloved Judge; have you not there the naked bones of a very dreadful thing, which does not need any tawdry eloquence of man to make it more solemn and more real? The unloving heart is always ill at ease in the presence of Him whom it does not love. The unloving heart does not love, because it does not trust, nor see the love. Therefore, the unloving heart is a heart that is only capable of apprehending the wrathful side of Christ's character. It is a heart devoid of the fruits of love which are likeness and righteousness, "without which no man shall see the Lord," nor stand the flash of the brightness of His coming. So there is no cruelty, no arbitrariness in the decree that the heart that loves not, when brought into contact with the infinite Lord of Love, must find in the touch death and not

life, darkness and not light, terror and not hope. Notice that Paul's negation *is* a negation and not an affirmation. He does not say "he that hateth," but "he that doth not love." The absence of the active emotion of love, which is the child of faith, the parent of righteousness, the condition of joy in His presence, is sufficient to ensure that this fate shall fall upon a man. I durst not enlarge. I leave the truth on your hearts.

II.—Secondly, notice the present grace of the coming Lord. "Our Lord cometh. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." These two things are not contradictory, but we often deal with them as if they were. And some men lay hold of the one side of the antithesis, and some men lay hold of the other, and rend them apart, and make antagonistic theories of Christianity out of them. But the real doctrine puts the two together and says there is no terror without tenderness, and there is no tenderness without terror. If we sacrifice the aspects of the Divine nature, as revealed to us in the gentle Christ, which kindle a wholesome dread, we have, all unwittingly, robbed the aspects of the Divine nature, which warm in us a gracious love, of their power to inflame and to illuminate. You cannot have love which is anything nobler than facile good nature and unrighteous indifference, unless you have along with it aspects of God's character and government which ought to make some men afraid. And you cannot keep these latter aspects from being exaggerated and darkened into a Moloch of cruelty, unless you remember that, side by side with them,

or rather underlying them and determining them, are aspects of the Divine nature to which only child-like confidence and calm beatific returns of love do rightly respond. The terror of the Lord is a garb which our sins force upon the love of the Lord. And when the one is presented it brings with it the other. Never should they be parted in our thoughts or in our teaching.

Note what that present grace is. It is a tenderness which gathers into its embrace all these imperfect, immoral, lax, heretical people in Corinth, as well as everywhere else—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with *you all.*" There were men in that church that said, "I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas, I of Christ." There were men in that church that had defiled their souls and their flesh, and corrupted the community, and blasphemed the name of Christ by such foul, sensual sin as was "not even named among the Gentiles." There were men in that church so dead to all the sanctities even of the communion-table as that, with the bread between their teeth and the wine-cup in their hands, one was hungry and another drunken. There were men in that church, whose Christianity was so anomalous and singularly fragmentary that they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. And yet Paul flings the great rainbow, as it were, of Christ's enclosing love over them all. And surely the love which gathers in such people leaves none outside its sweep; and the tenderness which stoops from heaven to pity, to pardon, to cleanse such is a tenderness to which the weakest, saddest, sinfullest, foulest of the sons of men may confi-

dently resort. Let nothing rob you of this assurance, that Christ, the coming Lord, is present with us all, and with all our weak and wicked brethren, in the full-condescension of His all-embracing, all-hoping, all-forgetting, and all-restoring love. All that we need, in order to get its full sunshine into our hearts, is that we trust Him utterly, and, so trusting, love Him back again with that love which is the fulfilling of the Law and the crown of the Gospel.

III.—And now, lastly, note the tenderness, caught from the Master Himself, of the servant who rebukes.

This last message of love from the Apostle himself, in verse 24, is quite anomalous. There is no other instance in his letters where he introduces himself and his own love at the end, after he has pronounced the solemn benediction commending to Christ's grace. But here, as if he had felt that he must leave an impression of himself on their minds, which corresponded to the impression of his Master that he desired to leave, he deviates from his ordinary habit, and makes his last word a personal word—"*My love* be with you all in Christ Jesus." Rebuke is the sign of love. Sharp condemnation may be the language of love. Plain warning of possible evils is the simple duty of love. So Paul folds all whom he has been rebuking in the warm embrace of his proffered love, which was the very cause of his rebuke. The healing balm of this closing message was to be applied to the wounds which his keen edged words had made, and to show that they were wounds by

a surgeon, not by a foe. In effect, this parting smile of love says: "I am not become your enemy because I tell you the truth; I show my love to you by the plainness and roughness of my words." Generalize that, free it from its personal reference, and it just comes to this: There never was a shallower sneer than the sneer which is cast at Christianity, as if it were harsh, "ferocious," or unloving, when it preaches the terror of the Lord. No! rather, because the Gospel *is* a Gospel, it must speak plainly about death and destruction to the unloving. The danger signal is not to be blamed for a collision, which it is hoisted to avert; and it is a strange sign of an unfeeling and unsympathetic, or of a harsh and gloomy system, that it should tell men where they are driving, in order that they may never reach the miserable goal. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." And when people say to us preachers, "Is that your Gospel, a Gospel that talks about everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord at the glory of His coming—is that your Gospel?" We can only answer, Yes! it is. Because, so to talk, may, by God's mercy, secure that some who hear shall never know anything of the wrath, save the hearing of it with the ear, and may, by the warning of it, be drawn to the Rock of Ages for safety and shelter from the storm.

Therefore, dear friends, the upshot of all that I have been feebly trying to say is just this: let us lay hold with all our hearts, and by simple faith, of the present grace of the coming,

loving Lord and Judge. You can do it. It is your only hope to do it. *Have* you done it? If so, then you may lift up your heads to the throne, and be glad, as those who know that their Friend and Deliverer will come at last, to help, to bless, to save. If not, dear friend, take the warning, that not to love is to be shrivelled like a leaf in the flame, at that coming which is life to them that love, and destruction to all besides. "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment."

XXV.

The Supreme Desire of the Devout Soul.

"Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God: Thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness."—Ps. cxliii. 10.

THESE two clauses mean substantially the same thing. The Psalmist's longings are expressed in the first of them in plain words, and in the second in a figure. "To do God's will" is to be in "the land of uprightness." That phrase, in its literal application, means a stretch of level country, and hence is naturally employed as an emblem of a moral or religious condition. A life of obedience to the will of God is likened to some far-stretching plain, easy to traverse, broken by no barren mountains or frowning cliffs, but basking, peaceful and fruitful, beneath the smile of God. Into such a garden of the Lord the Psalmist prays to be led.

In each case his prayer is based upon a motive or plea. "Thou art my God." His faith apprehends a personal bond between him and God, and

feels that that bond obliges God to teach him His will. If we adopt the readings in our Bibles of our second clause a still deeper and more wonderful plea is presented there. "Thy spirit is good," and therefore the trusting spirit has a right to ask to be made good likewise. The relation of the believing spirit to God not only obliges God to teach it His will, but to make it partaker of His own image and conformed to His own purity. So high on wings of faith and desire soared this man, who, at the beginning of his psalm was crushed to the dust by enemies and by dangers. So high we may rise by like means.

I.—Notice, then, first, the supreme aim of the devout soul.

We do not know who wrote this psalm. The superscription says that it was David's. And although its place in the Psalter seems to suggest another author, the peculiar fervour and closeness of intimacy with God which breathes through it are like the Davidic psalms, and seem to confirm the superscription. If so, it will naturally fall into its place with the others which were pressed from his heart by the persecution under Absalom. But be that as it may, whosoever wrote the psalm, he was a man in extremest misery and peril, and, as he says of himself, "persecuted," "overwhelmed," "desolate." The tempest blows him to the Throne of God; and when he is there, what does he ask? Deliverance? Scarcely. In one clause, and again at the end, as if by a kind of after-thought, he asks for the removal of the calamities. But the main burden of his prayer is

for a closer knowledge of God; the sound of His loving-kindness in his inward ear, light to show him the way wherein he should walk, and the sweet sunshine of God's face upon his heart. There is a better thing to ask than exemption from sorrows, even grace to bear them rightly. The supreme desire of the devout soul is practical conformity to the will of God. For the prayer of our text is not "Teach me to *know* Thy will." The Psalmist, indeed, has asked *that* in a previous clause—"Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." But knowledge is not all that we need, and the gulf between knowledge and practice is so deep that after we have prayed that we may be caused to know the way, and have received the answer, there still remains the need for God's help that knowledge may become life, and that all which we understand we may do. To such practical conformity to the will of God all other aspects of religion are meant to be subservient.

Christianity is a revelation of truth, but to accept it as such is not enough. Christianity brings to me exemption from punishment, escape from hell, deliverance from condemnation and guilt. And by some of us that is apt to be regarded as the whole Gospel; but pardon is only a means to an end. Christianity brings to us the possibility of indulgence in sweet and blessed emotions, and a fervour of feeling which to experience is the antepast of heaven. And for some of us, all our religion goes off in vaporous emotion; but feeling alone is not Christianity. Our religion brings to

us sweet and gracious consolations, but it is a poor affair if we only use it as an anodyne and a comfort. Our Christianity brings to us glorious hopes that flash lustre into the darkness, and make the solitude of the grave companionship, and the end of earth the beginning of life. But it is a poor affair if the mightiest operation of our religion be relegated to a future, and flung on to the close. All these things, the truth which the Gospel brings, the pardon and peace of conscience which it ensures, the joyful emotion which it sets loose from the ice of indifference, the sweet consolations with which it pillows the weary head and bandages the bleeding heart, and the great hopes which flash light into glazing eyes, and make the end glorious with the rays of a beginning, and the western heaven bright with the promise of a new day—all these things are but subservient means to this highest purpose, that we should *do* the will of God, and be conformed to His image. They whose religion has not reached that apex have yet to understand its highest meaning. The river of the water of life that proceeds from the Throne of God and the Lamb is not sent merely to refresh thirsty lips, and to bring music into the silence of a waterless desert, but it is sent to drive the wheels of life. Action, not thought, is the end of God's revelation, and the perfecting of man.

But, then, let us remember that we shall most imperfectly apprehend the whole sweep and blessedness of this great supreme aim of the devout soul, if we regard this doing of God's will as merely the external of obedience to an external

command. Simple doing is not enough; the deed must be the fruit of love. The aim of the Christian life is not obedience to a law that is recognised as authoritative, but joyful moulding of ourselves after a law that is felt to be sweet and loving. "I delight to do Thy will, yea! Thy law is within my heart." Only when thus the will yields itself in loving and glad conformity to the will of God is true obedience possible for us. Brother! Is that your Christianity? Do you desire, more than anything besides, that what He wills you should will, and that His law should be stamped upon your hearts, and all your rebellious desires and purposes should be brought into a sweet captivity which is freedom, and an obedience to Christ which is Kingship over the universe and yourselves?

II.—Note, secondly, the Divine teaching and touch which are required for this conformity.

The Psalmist betakes himself to prayer, because he knows that of himself he cannot bring his will into this attitude of harmonious submission. And his prayer for "teaching" is deepened in the second clause of our text into a petition, which is substantially the same in meaning, but yet sets the felt need and the coveted help in a still more striking light, in its cry for the touch of God's good spirit to guide, as by a hand grasping the Psalmist's hand, into the paths of obedience.

We may learn from this prayer, then, that practical conformity to God's will can never be attained by our own efforts. Remember all the hindrances that rise between us and it; these wild passions of

ours, this obstinate gravitating of tastes and desires towards earth, these animal necessities, these spiritual perversities, which make up so much of us all—how can we coerce these into submission? Our better selves sit within like some prisoned king, surrounded and "fooled by the rebel powers" of his revolted subjects; and our best resource is to send an embassy to the over-lord, the Sovereign King, praying Him to come to our help. We cannot will to will as God wills, but we can turn ourselves to Him, and ask Him to put the power within us which shall subdue the evil, conquer the rebels, and make us masters of our own else anarchic and troubled spirits. For all honest attempts to make the will of God our wills, the one secret of success is confident and continual appeal to Him. A man must have gone a very little way, very superficially and perfunctorily, on the path of seeking to make himself what he ought to be, unless he has found out that he cannot do it, and unless he has found out that there is only one way to do it, and that is to go to God and say, "O Lord! I am baffled and beaten. I put the reins into Thy hand; do Thou inspire and direct and sanctify."

That practical conformity to the will of God requires Divine teaching. But yet that teaching must be no outward thing. It is not enough that we should have communicated to us, as from without, the clearest knowledge of what we ought to be. There must be more that that. Our Psalmist's prayer was a prophecy. He said, "Teach me to do Thy will." And he thought, no

doubt, of an inward teaching which should mould his nature as well as enlighten it; of the communication of impulses as well as of conceptions; of something which should make him love the Divine will, as well as of something which should make him know it.

You and I have Jesus Christ for our Teacher, the answer to the Psalm. His teaching is inward and deep and real, and answers to all the necessities of the case. We have His example to stand as our perfect law. If we want to know what is God's will, we have only to turn to that life; and however different from ours His may have been in its outward circumstances, and however fragmentary and brief its records in the Gospels may sometimes seem to us, yet in these little booklets, telling of the quiet life of the Carpenter's Son, there is guidance for every man and woman in all circumstances, however complicated. And we do not need anything more to teach us what God's will is than the life of Jesus Christ. His teaching goes deeper than example. He comes into our hearts, He moulds our wills. His teaching is by inward impulses and communications of desire and power to do, as well as of light to know. A law has been given which can give life. As the modeller will take a piece of wax into his hand, and by warmth and manipulation make it soft and pliable, so Jesus Christ, if we let Him, will take our hard hearts into His hands, and by gentle, loving, subtle touches, will shape them into the pattern of His own perfect beauty, and will mould all their vagrant inclinations and aberrant distortions into "one immortal feature of

loveliness and perfection." "The *grace of God* that bringeth salvation has appeared unto all men *teaching* that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly," controlling ourselves, "righteously," fulfilling all our obligations to our fellows, "and godly," referring everything to Him, "in this present world."

That practical conformity to the Divine will requires, still further, the operation of the Divine Spirit as our guide. "Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." There is only one power that can draw us out of the far-off land of rebellious disobedience, where the prodigals and the swine's husks and the famine and the rags are, into the "land of uprightness," and that is, the communicated Spirit of God, which is given to all them that desire it, and will lead them in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. It is He that works in us, the willing and the doing, according to His own good pleasure. "He shall guide you," said the Master, "unto all truth"—not merely into its knowledge, but into its performance; not merely into truth of conception, but into truth of practice, which is righteousness, and the fulfilling of the Law.

III.—Lastly, note the Divine guarantee that this practical conformity shall be ours.

The Psalmist pleads with God a double motive—His relation to us and His own perfectness, "Thou art my God; therefore teach me." "Thy Spirit is good; therefore lead me into the land of uprightness." I can but glance for a moment at these two pleas of the prayer.

Note, then, first, God's personal relation to the devout soul, as the guarantee that that soul shall be taught, not merely to know, but also to do His will. If He be "my God," there can be no deeper desire in His heart, than that His will should be my will. And this He desires, not from any masterfulness or love of dominion, but only from love to us. If He be my God, and therefore longing to have me obedient, He will not withhold what is needed to make me so. God is no hard taskmaster who sets us to make bricks without straw. Whatsoever He commands He gives, and His commandments are always second and His gifts first. He bestows Himself and then He says, "For the love's sake, do My will." Be sure that the sacred bond which knits us to Him is regarded by Him, the faithful Creator, as an obligation which He recognises and respects and will discharge. We have a right to go to Him and to say to Him, "Thou art my God; and Thou wilt not be what Thou art, nor do what Thou hast pledged Thyself to do, unless Thou makest me to know and to do Thy will."

And, on the other hand, if we have taken Him for ours, and have the bond knit from our side as well as from His, then the fact of our faith gives us a claim on Him which He is sure to honour. The soul that can say, "I have taken Thee for mine," has a hold on God which God is only too glad to recognise and to vindicate. And whosoever, humbly trusting to that great Father in the heavens, feels that he belongs to God, and that God belongs to him, is warranted in saying, "Teach me,

and make me to do Thy will," and in being confident of an answer.

And there is the other plea with Him and guarantee for us, drawn from God's own moral character and perfectness. The last clause of my text may either be read as our Bible has it, "Thy Spirit is good; lead me," or "Let Thy good Spirit lead me." In either case the goodness of the Divine Spirit is the plea on which the prayer is grounded. The *goodness* here referred to is, as I take it, not merely beneficence and kindliness, but rather goodness in its broader and loftier sense of perfect moral purity. So that the thought just comes to this—we have the right to expect that we shall be made participant of the Divine nature. So sweet, so deep, so tender is the tie that knits a devout soul to God, that nothing short of conformity to the perfect purity of God can satisfy the aspirations of the creature or discharge the obligations of the Creator.

It is a daring thought. The Psalmist's desire was a prophecy. The New Testament vindicates and fulfils it when it says "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Since he now dwells in "the land of uprightness," who once dwelt among us in this weary world of confusion and of sin, then we one day shall be with Him. Christ's heart cannot be satisfied; Christ's Cross cannot be rewarded; the Divine nature cannot be at rest; the purpose of redemption cannot be accomplished, until all that have trusted in Christ be partakers of Divine purity, and all the wanderers be led by devious and yet by right paths, by crooked and

yet by straight ways, by places rough and yet smooth, into "the land of uprightness." Where and what He is, there and that shall also His servants be.

My brother! If to do the will of God is to dwell in the land of uprightness, disobedience is to dwell in a dry and thirsty land, barren and dreary, horrid with frowning rocks and jagged cliffs, where every stone cuts the feet and every step is a blunder, and all the paths end at last on the edge of an abyss, and crumble into nothingness beneath the despairing foot that treads them. Do you see to it that you walk in ways of righteousness which are paths of peace; and look for all the help you need, with assured faith, to Him who shall guide us by His counsel and afterwards receive us to His glory.

XXVI.

The Delays of Love.

"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard, therefore, that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was."—John xi. 5, 6.

E learn from a later verse of this chapter that Lazarus had been dead four days, when Christ reached Bethany. The distance from that village to the probable place of Christ's abode, when He received the message, was about a day's journey. If, therefore, to the two days on which He abode still after the receipt of the news, we add the day which the messengers took to reach Him and the day which He occupied in travelling, we get the four days since which Lazarus had been laid in his grave. Consequently, the probability is that, when our Lord got the message, the man was dead. Christ did not remain still, therefore, in order to work a greater miracle by raising Lazarus from the dead than He would have done by healing, but He stayed—strange as it would appear—for reasons closely connected with the highest well-being of all the beloved three, and *because* He loved them.

John is always very particular in his use of that word "therefore," and he points out many a subtle and beautiful connection of cause and effect by his employment of it. I do not know that any of them are more significant and more full of illumination with regard to the ways of Divine providence than the instance before us. How these two sisters must have looked down the rocky road, that led up from Jericho, during those four weary days, to see if there were any signs of His coming! How strange it must have appeared to the disciples themselves that He made no sign of movement, notwithstanding the message! Perhaps John's scrupulous carefulness, in pointing out that His love was Christ's reason for His quiescence, may reflect a remembrance of the doubts, that had crept over the minds of himself and his brethren, during these two days of strange inaction. The evangelist will have us learn a lesson, which reaches far beyond the instance in hand, and casts light on many dark places.

I.—Christ's delays are the delays of love.

We have all of us, I suppose, had experience of desires for the removal of bitterness or sorrows, or for the fulfilment of expectations and wishes, which we believed, on the best evidence that we could find, to be in accordance with His will, and which we have been able to make prayers out of, in true faith and submission, which prayers have had to be offered over and over and over again, and no answer has come. It is part of the method of Providence that the lifting away of the burden and the coming of the desires should be a hope deferred.

And instead of stumbling at the mystery, or feeling as if it made a great demand upon our faith, would it not be wiser for us to lay hold of that little word of the Apostle's here, and to see in it a small window that opens out on to a boundless prospect, and a glimpse into the very heart of the Divine motives in His dealings with us?

If we could once get that conviction into our hearts, how quietly we should go about our work! What a beautiful and brave patience there would be in us, if we habitually felt that the only reason which actuates God's providence in its choice of times of fulfilling our desires and lifting away our bitterness is our own good! Nothing but the purest and simplest love, transparent and without a fold in it, sways Him in all that He does. Why should it be so difficult for us to believe this? If we were more in the way of looking at life, with all its often unwelcome duty, and its arrows of pain and sorrow, and all its disappointments, and other ills that it is heir to, as a discipline, and were to think less about the unpleasantness, and more about the purpose, of what befalls us, we should find far less difficulty in understanding that the delay is born of the love, and is a token of His tender care.

Sorrow is prolonged for the same reason as it was sent. It is of little use to send it for a little while. In the majority of cases, time is an element in its working its right effect upon us. If the weight is lifted, the elastic substance beneath springs up again. As soon as the wind passes over the corn-field, the bowing ears raise themselves. You have

to steep foul things in water for a good while before the pure liquid washes out the stains. And so time is an element in all the good that we get out of the discipline of life. Therefore, the same love which sends must necessarily protract, beyond our desires, the discipline under which we are put. If we thought of it, as I have said, more frequently as discipline and schooling, and less frequently as pain and a burden, we should understand the meaning of things a great deal better than we do, and should be able to face them with braver hearts, and with a patient, almost joyous, endurance.

If we think of some of the purposes of our sorrows and burdens, we shall discern still more clearly that time is needed for accomplishing them, and that, therefore, love must delay its coming to take them away. For example, the object of them all, and the highest blessing, that any of us can obtain, is that our wills should be bent until they coincide with God's, and that takes time. The shipwright when he gets a bit of timber that he wants to make a "knee" out of, knows that to mould it into the right form is not the work of a day. A will may be *broken* at a blow, but it will take a while to *bend* it. And just because swiftly passing disasters have little permanent effect in moulding our wills, it is a blessing, and not an evil, to have some standing fact in our lives, which will make a continual demand upon us for continually repeated acts of bowing ourselves beneath His sweet, though it may

seem severe, will. God's love in Jesus Christ can give us nothing better than the opportunity of bowing our wills to His, and saying, "Not mine, but Thine be done." If that is why He stops on the other side of Jordan, and does not come even to the loving messages of beloved hearts, then He shows His love in the sweetest and the loftiest form. So, dear friends, if you carry a life-long sorrow, do not think that it is a mystery why it should lie upon your shoulders, when there is Omnipotence and an infinite Heart in the heavens. If it has the effect of bending you to His purpose, it is the truest token of His loving care that He can send. In like manner, is it not worth carrying a weight of unfulfilled wishes, and a weariness of unalleviated sorrows, if these do teach us three things, which are one thing—faith, endurance, prayerfulness, and so knit us by a threefold cord that cannot be broken to the very heart of God Himself?

II.—This delayed help always comes at the right time.

Do not let us forget that heaven's clock is different from ours. In our day there are twelve hours, and in God's a thousand years. What seems long to us is to Him "a little while." Let us not imitate the short-sighted impatience of His disciples, who said, "What is this that He saith, A little while? We cannot tell what He saith." The time of separation looked so long in anticipation to them, and to Him it had dwindled to a moment. Two days, eight-and-forty hours, He delayed His answer to Mary and Martha, and they thought it an

eternity, while the heavy hours crept by, and they only said, "It's very weary, He cometh not." How long did it look to them when they had got Lazarus back?

The longest protraction of the fulfilment of the most yearning expectation and unfulfilled desire will seem but as the winking of an eyelid, when we get to estimate duration by the same scale by which He estimates it, the scale of Eternity. The ephemeral insect, born in the morning and dead when the day falls, has a still minuter scale than ours, but we should not think of regulating our estimate of long and short by it. Do not let us commit the equal absurdity of regulating the march of His Providence by the swift beating of our timepieces. God works leisurely because God has eternity to work in.

The answer always comes at the right time, and is punctual though delayed. For instance, Peter is in prison. The Church keeps praying for him; prays on, day after day. No answer! The week of the feast comes. Prayer is made intensely and fervently and continuously. No answer! The slow hours pass away. The last day of his life, as it would appear, comes and goes. No answer! The night gathers; prayer rises to heaven. The last hour of the last watch of the last night that he had to live has come, and as the veil of darkness is thinning, and the day is beginning to break, "the angel of the Lord shone round about him." But there is no haste in his deliverance. All is done leisurely, as in the confidence of ample time to spare, and perfect security. He is bidden to arise

quickly, but there is no hurry in the stages of his liberation. "Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals." He is to take time to lace them. There is no fear of the quaternion of soldiers waking, or of there not being time to do all. We can fancy the half-sleeping and wholly-bewildered Apostle fumbling at the sandal strings, in dread of some movement rousing his guards, and the calm angel face looking on. The sandals fastened, he is bidden to put on his garments and follow. With equal leisure and orderliness he is conducted through the first and the second guard of sleeping soldiers, and then through the prison gate. He might have been lifted at once clean out of his dungeon, and set down in the house where many were gathered praying for him. But more signal was the demonstration of power which a deliverance so gradual gave, when it led him slowly past all obstacles and paralysed their power. God is never in haste. He never comes too soon nor too late. "The Lord shall help them, and that right early." Sennacherib's army is round the city, famine is within the walls. To-morrow will be too late. But to-night the angel strikes, and the enemies are all dead men. So God's delay makes the deliverance the more signal and joyous when it is granted. And though hope deferred may sometimes make the heart sick, the desire when it comes is a tree of life.

III.—The best help is not delayed.

The principle which we have been illustrating applies only to one half—and that the less important half—of our prayers and of Christ's

answers. For, in regard to spiritual blessings and our petitions for fuller, purer, and Diviner life, there is no delay. In that region the law is not "He abode still two days in the same place," but "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear." If you have been praying for deeper knowledge of God; for lives like His; for hearts more filled with the Spirit; and have not got the answer, do not fall back upon the misapplication of such a principle as this of my text, which has nothing to do with that region; but remember that the only reason why good people do not immediately get the blessings of the Christian life for which they ask lies in themselves, and not at all in God. "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask and have not, because" —not because He delays, but because—"ye ask amiss," or because, having asked, you get up from your knees and go away, not looking to see whether the blessing is coming down or not.

Ah! There is a sad amount of lying and hypocrisy in prayers for spiritual blessings. Many petitioners do not want to have them. They would not know what to do with them if they got them. They make the requests because their fathers did so before them, and because these are the right kinds of things to say in a prayer. Such prayers get no answers. If a man prays for some spiritual enlargement, and then goes out into the world and lives clean contrary to his prayers, what right has he to say that God delays His answers? No! He does not delay His answers, but we push back His answers, and the gift that *is* given we will not take.

Let us remember that the two halves of the Divine dealings are not regulated by the same principle, though they be regulated by the same motive; and that the love which often delays for our good, in regard of the desires that have reference to outward things, is swift as the lightning to answer every petition which moves within the circle of our spiritual life.

"Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye stand praying, believe that 'then and there' ye receive them"; and the undelaying God will take care that "you shall have them."

XXVII.

A Parable in a Miracle.

"And there came a leper to Him, beseeching Him, and kneeling down to Him, and saying unto Him, If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.

"And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand, and touched him, and saith unto him: I will; be thou clean.

"And as soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed."—Mark i. 40—42.

CHRIST'S miracles are called wonders—that is, deeds which, by their exceptional character, arrest attention and excite surprise. Further, they are called "mighty works"—that is, exhibitions of superhuman power. They are still further called "signs"—that is, tokens of His Divine mission. But they are signs in another sense, being, as it were, parables as well as miracles, and representing on the lower plane of material things the effects of His working on men's spirits. Thus, His feeding of the hungry speaks of His higher operation as the Bread of Life. His giving sight to the blind foreshadows His illumination of darkened minds. His healing of the diseased speaks of His restoration of sick

souls. His stilling of the tempest tells of Him as the Peace-bringer for troubled hearts; and His raising of the dead proclaims Him as the Life-giver, who quickens with the true life all who believe on Him. This parabolic aspect of the miracles is obvious in the case before us. Leprosy received exceptional treatment under the Mosaic law, and the peculiar restrictions to which the sufferer was subjected, as well as the ritual of his cleansing, in the rare cases where the disease wore itself out, are best explained by being considered as symbolical rather than as sanitary. It was taken as an emblem of sin. Its hideous symptoms, its rotting sores, its slow, stealthy, steady progress, its defiance of all known means of cure, made its victim only too faithful a walking image of that worse disease. Remembering this deeper aspect of leprosy, let us study this miracle before us, and try to gather its lessons.

I.—First, then, notice the leper's cry.

Mark connects the story with our Lord's first journey through Galilee, which was signalized by many miracles, and had excited much stir and talk. The news of the Healer had reached the isolated huts where the lepers herded, and had kindled a spark of hope in one poor wretch, which emboldened him to break through all regulations, and thrust his tainted and unwelcome presence into the shrinking crowd. He seems to have appeared there suddenly, having forced or stolen his way somehow into Christ's presence. And there he was, with his horrible white face, with his tightened, glistening skin, with some frowsy rag over his

mouth, and a hunted look as of a wild beast in his eyes. The crowd shrank back from him; he had no difficulty in making his way to where Christ is sitting, calmly teaching. And Mark's vivid narrative shows him to us, flinging himself down before the Lord, and, without waiting for question or pause, interrupting whatever was going on, with his piteous cry. Misery and wretchedness make short work of conventional politeness.

Note the keen sense of misery that impels to the passionate desire for relief. A leper with the flesh dropping off his bones could not suppose that there was nothing the matter with him. His disease was too gross and palpable not to be felt; and the depth of misery measured the earnestness of desire. The parallel fails us there. The emblem is all insufficient, for here is the very misery of our deepest misery, that we are unconscious of it, and sometimes even come to love it. There are forms of sickness in which the man goes about, and to each enquiry says, "I am perfectly well"; though everybody else can see death written on his face. And so it is with this terrible malady that has laid its corrupting and putrefying finger upon us all. The worse we are, the less we know that there is anything the matter with us; and the deeper the leprosy has struck its filthy fangs into us, the more ready we are to say that we are sound. We preachers have it for one of our first duties to try to rouse men to the recognition of the facts of their spiritual condition, and all our efforts are too often—as I, for my part, sometimes half despairingly feel when I stand in

the pulpit—like a fire-brand dropped into a pond, which hisses for a moment and then is extinguished. Men and women sit in pews listening contentedly and quietly, who, if they saw themselves, I do not say even as God sees them, but as others see them, would know that the leprosy is deep in them, and the taint patent to every eye. I do not charge you, my brother, with gross transgressions of plain moralities; I know nothing about that. I know this; "As face answereth to face in a glass," so doth the heart of man to man. And I bring this message, we have all gone astray, and wounds and bruises and putrefying sores mark us all. Oh! if the best of us could see himself for once, in the light of God, as the worst of us will see himself one day, the cry would come from the purest lips, "Oh! wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death—this life in death that I carry, rotting and smelling foul to Heaven, about with me, whereso-ever I go?"

Note, further, this man's confidence in Christ's power: thou canst make me clean." He had heard all about the miracles that were being wrought up and down over the country, and he came to the Worker, with nothing of the nature of religious faith in him, but with entire confidence, based upon the report of previous miracles, in Christ's ability to heal. I do not suppose that in its nature, it was very different from the trust with which savages will crowd round a traveller that has a medicine chest with him, and expect to be cured of their diseases. But still it was real

confidence in our Lord's power to heal. As a rule, though not without exceptions, He required (we may perhaps say He needed) such confidence as a condition of His miracle-working power.

If we turn from the emblem to the thing signified, from the leprosy of the body to that of the spirit, we may be sure of Christ's omnipotent ability to cleanse from the extremest severity of the disease, however inveterate and chronic it may have become. Sin dominates men by two opposite lies. I have said how hard it is to get people's consciences awakened to see the facts of their moral and religious condition; but then, when they are woke up, it is almost as hard to keep them from the other extreme. The devil, first of all, says to a man, "It is only a little one. Do it; you will be none the worse. You can give it up when you like, you know." That is the lauguage before the act. Afterwards, his language is, first, "You have done no harm, never mind what people say about sin. Make yourself comfortable." And then, when that lie wears itself out, the mask is dropped, and this is what is said: "I have got you now, and you cannot get away. Done is done! What thou hast written thou hast written; and neither thou nor anybody else can blot it out." Hence the despair into which awakened consciences are apt to drop, and the feeling, which dogs the sense of evil like a spectre, of the hopelessness of all attempts to make oneself better. Brethren, they are both lies; the lie that we are pure is the first; the lie that we are too black to be purified is the

second. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and make God a liar." But if we say, as some of us, when once our consciences are stirred, are but too apt to say, "We have sinned, and it cleaves to us for ever," we deceive ourselves still worse, and still more darkly and doggedly contradict the sure word of God. Christ's blood atones for all past sin, and has power to bring forgiveness to every one. Christ's vital spirit will enter into any heart, and, abiding there, has power to make the foulest clean.

Note, again, the leper's hesitation. "If Thou wilt." He had no right to presume on Christ's goodwill. He know nothing about the principles upon which His miracles were wrought and His mercy extended. He supposed, no doubt, as he was bound to suppose, in the absence of any plain knowledge, that it was a mere matter of accident, of caprice, of momentary inclination and good nature, to whom the gift of healing should come. And so he draws near with the modest "If Thou wilt"; not pretending to know more than he knew, or to have a claim which he had not. But his hesitation is quite as much entreaty as hesitation. What do we mean when we say about a man, "He can do it, if he likes," but to imply that it is so easy to do it, that it would be cruel not to do it? And so, when the leper said, "If Thou wilt Thou canst," he meant, "There is no obstacle standing between me and health but Thy will, and surely it cannot be Thy will to leave me is this life in death." He, as it were, throws the responsibility for his health or disease upon Christ's

shoulders, and thereby makes the strongest appeal to that loving heart.

We stand on another level. The leper's hesitation is our certainty. We know the principle upon which His mercy is dispensed; we know that it is a universal all-embracing love; we know that no caprice nor pasing spasm of good nature lies at the bottom of it. We know that if any men are not healed, it is not because Christ will not, but because they will not. If ever there springs in our hearts the dark doubt "If Thou wilt," which was innocent in this man in the twilight of his knowledge, but is wrong in us in the full noontide of ours, we ought to be able to banish it at once, and to lay none of the responsibility of our continuing unhealed on Christ, but all on ourselves. He has laid it there, when He lamented, "How often would I—and ye would not!" Nothing can be more in accordance with the will of God, of which Jesus Christ is the embodiment, than to deliver men from sin, which is the opposite of His will.

II.—Notice, secondly, the Lord's answer.

Mark's record of this miracle puts the miracle in very small compass, and dilates rather upon the attitude and mind of Jesus Christ preparatory to it. As if, apart altogether from the supernatural element and the lessons that are to be drawn from it, it was worth our while to ponder, for the gladdening of our hearts and the strengthening of our hopes, on that lovely picture of sheer simple compassion and tender-heartedness. "Jesus, *moved with compassion*"—a clause which occurs

only in Mark's account—"put forth His hand and touched him, and said, I will; be thou clean."

Note, then, three things—the compassion, the touch, the word.

As to the first, is it not a precious gift for us, in the midst of our many wearinesses and sorrows and sicknesses, to have that picture of Jesus Christ bending over the leper, and sending, as it were, a gush of pitying love from His heart to flood away all his miseries? It is a true revelation of the heart of Jesus Christ. Simple pity is its very core. That pity is eternal, and subsists, as He sits in the calm of the Heavens, even as it was manifest whilst He sat teaching in the humble house in Galilee. For "we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities." The pitying Christ is near us all. Nor let us forget that it is this swift shoot of pity which underlies all that follows—the touch, the word, and the cure. Christ does not wait to be moved by the prayers that come from these leprous lips, but He is moved by the leprous lips themselves. The sight of the man affects His pitying heart, which sets in motion all the wheels of His healing powers. So we may learn that the impulse to which His redeeming activity owes its origin wells up from His own heart. Show Him sorrow, and He answers it by a pity of such a sort that it is restless till it helps and assuages. We may rise higher. The pity of Jesus Christ is the summit of His revelation of the Father, and, looking upon that gentle heart, into whose depths we can see as through a little

window by these words of my text, we must stand with hushed reverence as beholding not only the compassion of the Man, but therein manifested the pity of the God, who, "Like as a father pitieth his children, pitieth them that fear Him," and pities yet more the more miserable men who fear and love Him not. The Christian's God is no impassive Being, indifferent to mankind, but "One who in all our afflictions is afflicted, and, in His love and in His pity," redeems and bears and carries.

Note, still further, the Lord's touch. With swift obedience to the impulse of His pity, Christ thrusts forth His hand and touches the leper. There was much in it that, but whatever more we may see in it, we should not be blind to the loving humanity of the act. Remember that the man kneeling there had felt no touch of a hand for years; that the very kisses of his own children and his wife's grasp of love were denied him. And now Jesus puts out His hand, and, without thinking of Mosaic restrictions and ceremonial prohibitions, yields to the impulse of His pity, and gives assurance of His sympathy and His brotherhood as He lays His pure fingers upon the rotting ulcers. All men that help their fellows must be contented thus to identify themselves with them and to take them by the hand, if they would seek to deliver them from their evils.

Remember, too, that according to the Mosaic law it was forbidden to any but the priest to touch a leper. Therefore, in this act, beautiful as it is in its uncalculated humanity, there may have been

something intended of a deeper kind. Our Lord thereby does one of two things—either He asserts His authority as overriding that of Moses and all his regulations, or He asserts His sacerdotal character. Either way there is a great claim in the act.

Further, we may take that touch of Christ's as being a parable of His whole work. It was a piece of wonderful sympathy and condescension that He should put out His hand to touch the leper; but it was the result of a far greater and more wonderful piece of sympathy and condescension that He had a hand to touch him with. For the "sweet human hands and lips and eyes" which He wore in this world were assumed by Him in order that He might make Himself one with all the sufferers and bear the burden of all their sins. So His touch of the leper symbolizes His identifying of Himself with mankind, the foulest and the most degraded; and in this connection there is a profound meaning in one of the ordinarily trivial legends of the Rabbis, who, founding upon a word of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, tell us that when Messias comes He will be found sitting amongst the lepers at the gate of the city. So He was numbered amongst the transgressors in His life, and "with the wicked in His death." He touches, and, touching, contracts no impurity, cleansing as the sunlight or the fire does, by burning up the impurity, and not by receiving it into Himself.

Note the Lord's word, "I will; be thou clean." It is shaped, convolution for convolution, so to speak, to match the man's prayer. He ever moulds

His response according to the feebleness and imperfection of the petitioner's faith. But, at the same time, what a ring of autocratic authority and conscious sovereignty there is in the brief, calm, imperative word, "I will; be thou clean!" He accepts the leper's ascription of power; He claims to work the miracle by His own will, and therein He is either guilty of what comes very near arrogant blasphemy, or He is rightly claiming for Himself a Divine prerogative. If His word can tell as a force on material things, what is the conclusion? He who "speaks and it is done" is Almighty and Divine.

III.—Lastly, note the immediate cure.

Mark tells, with his favourite word, "straightway," how as soon as Christ had spoken, the leprosy departed from him. And to turn from the symbol to the fact, the same sudden and complete cleansing is possible for us. Our cleansing from sin must depend upon the present love and present power of Jesus Christ. On account of Christ's sacrifice, whose efficacy is eternal, and lies at the foundation of all our blessedness and our purity until the heavens shall be no more, we are forgiven our sins, and our guilt is taken away. By the present indwelling of that cleansing Spirit of the ever-living Christ, which will be given to us each if we seek it, we are cleansed day by day from our evil. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," not only when shed as propitiation, but when applied as sanctifying. We must come to Christ, and there must be a real living contact between us and Him through our faith, if we are to possess

either the forgiveness or the cleansing which are wrapped up inseparable in His gift.

Further, the suddenness of this cure and its completeness may be reproduced in us. People tell us that to believe in sudden conversion is fanatical. This is not the place to argue that question. It seems to me that such suddenness is in accordance with analogy. And I, for my part, preach with full belief and in the hope that the words may not be spoken altogether in vain to every man, woman, and child listening to me, irrespective of their condition, character, and past, that there is no reason why they should not go to Him straightway, no reason why He should not put out His hand straightway and touch them; no reason why their leprosy should not pass from them straightway, and they lie down to sleep to-night accepted in the Beloved and cleansed in Him. Trust Him and He will do it.

Only remember, it was of no use to the leper that crowds had been healed, that floods of blessing had been poured over the land. What he wanted was that a rill should come and refresh his own lips. If you want to have Christ's cleansing you must make personal work of it, and come with this prayer, "On *me* be all that cleansing shown!" You do not need to go to Him with an "If" nor a prayer, for His gift has not waited for our asking, and He has anticipated us by coming with healing in His wings. The parts are reversed, and He prays you to receive the gift, and stands before each of us with the gentle remonstrance upon His lips: "Why will ye die when I

am here ready to cure you?" Take Him at His word, for He offers to us all, whether we desire it or no, the cleansing which we need. Take Him at His word, trust Him wholly, trust to His death for forgiveness, to His sanctifying Spirit for cleansing, and "straightway" your "leprosy will depart from you," and your flesh shall become like the flesh of a little child, and you shall be clean.

XXVIII.

The Burden-Bearing God.

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits"—(Authorized Version).

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily *beareth our burdens*."—Ps. lxviii. 19 (Revised Version).

THE difference between these two renderings seems to be remarkable, and a person ignorant of any language but our own might find it hard to understand how any one sentence was susceptible of both. But the explanation is extremely simple. The important words in the Authorized Version, "with benefits," are a supplement, having nothing to represent them in the original. The word translated "*loadeth*" in the one rendering and "*beareth*" in the other admits of both these meanings with equal ease, and is, in fact, employed in both of them in other places in Scripture. It is clear, I think, that, in this case, at all events, the revision is an improvment. For the great objection to the rendering which has become familiar to us all, "Who daily loadeth us *with benefits*," is that these essential

words are not in the original, and need to be supplied in order to make out the sense. Whereas, on the other hand, if we adopt the suggested emendation, "Who daily beareth our burdens," we get a still more beautiful meaning, which requires no force or addition in order to bring it out. So, then, I accept that varied form of our text as the one on which I desire to say a few words now.

I.—The first thing that strikes me in looking at it is the remarkable and eloquent blending of majesty and condescension.

It is not without significance that the Psalmist employs that name for God in this clause which most strongly expresses the idea of supremacy and dominion. Rule and dignity are the predominant ideas in the word "Lord," as indeed the English reader feels in hearing it; and then, side by side with that, there lies this thought, that the Highest, the Ruler of all, whose absolute authority stretches over all mankind, stoops to this low and servile office, and becomes the burden-bearer for all the pilgrims who will put their trust in Him. This blending together of the two ideas of dignity and condescension to lowly offices of help and furtherance is made even more emphatic if we glance back at the context of the psalm. For there is no place in Scripture in which there is flashed before the mind of the singer a grander picture of the magnificence and the glory of God than that which glitters and flames in the previous verses. We read in them of God "riding through the heavens by His name Jehovah"; of Him as marching at the head of the people through the

wilderness, and of the earth quivering at His tread, and the heavens dropping at His presence. We read of Zion itself being moved at the presence of the Lord. We read of His word going forth so mightily as to scatter armies and their kings. We read of the chariots of God as "20,000, even thousands of angels." And all is gathered together in the great verse, "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive." And then, before he has taken breath almost, the Psalmist turns, with most striking and dramatic abruptness, from the contemplation, awe-struck and yet jubilant, of all that tremendous, magnificent, and earth-shaking power, to this wonderful thought, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burdens." Not only does He march at the head of the congregation through the wilderness, but He comes, if I might so say, behind the caravan, amongst the carriers and the porters, and will bear anything that any of the weary pilgrims entrusts to His care.

Oh! dear brethren, if familiarity did not dull the glory of it, what a thought that is — a God that carries men's loads! People talk much rubbish about the "stern Old Testament Deity": is there anything sweeter, greater, more heart-compelling and heart-softening, than such a thought as this? How all the majesty bows itself and declares itself to be enlisted on our side when we think that "He that sitteth on the circle of the heavens, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers," is the God that "daily beareth our burdens!"

And that is the tone of the Old Testament throughout, for you will always find braided together in the closest vital unity the representation of these two aspects of the Divine nature; and if ever we have set forth a more than ordinarily magnificent conception of His power and majesty be sure that, if you look, you will find side by side with it a more than ordinarily tender representation of His gentleness and His grace. And, if we look deeper, this is not a case of contrast, it is not that there are sharply opposed to each other these two things, the gentleness and the greatness, the condescension and the magnificence, but that the former is the direct result of the latter; and it is just because He is Lord, and has dominion over all, that, therefore, He bears the burdens of all. For the responsibilities of the Creator are in proportion to His greatness, and He that has made man has thereby made it necessary that He should, if they will let Him, be their Burden-bearer and their Servant. The highest must be the lowest, and just because God is high over all, blessed for ever, therefore is He the Supporter and Sustainer of all. So we may learn the true meaning of elevation of all sorts, and, from the example of the loftiest, may draw the lesson for our more insignificant varieties of height, that the higher we are, the more we are bound to stoop, and that men are then likest God when their elevation suggests to them responsibility, and when He that is chiefest becomes the Servant.

II.—So, then, notice next the deep insight into the heart and ways of God here.

"He daily beareth our burdens." If there is any meaning in this word at all, it means that He so knits Himself with us as that all which touches us touches Him, that He takes a share in all our pressing duties, and feels the reflection from all our sorrows and pains. We have no impassive God in the heavens, careless of mankind, nor is His settled and changeless and unshaded blessedness of such a sort as that there cannot pass across it—if I may not say a shadow, I may at least say—a ripple from men's pangs and troubles and cares. Love is the identification of one's self with the beloved object. We call it sympathy when we are speaking about the fellow feeling between man and man that is kindled of love. But there is something deeper than sympathy in that great Heart, which gathers into itself all hearts, and in that great Being, whose being underlies all our beings, and is the root from which we all live and grow. God, in all our afflictions, is afflicted; and, in simple though profound verity, has that which is most truly represented to men, by calling it a fellow feeling with our infirmities and our sorrows.

> "Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
> And thy Maker is not nigh;
> Think not thou canst weep a tear
> And thy Maker is not near."

For want of a better word, we speak of the sympathy of God; but we need something far more intimate and unwearied than we understand

by that word, to express the community of feeling between all who trust Him and His own infinite heart. If this bearing of our burden means anything it gives us a deep insight, too, into His workings, as well as into His heart. For it covers over this great truth that He Himself comes to us, and by the communication of His own power to us makes us able to bear the burdens which we roll upon Him. The meaning of His "lifting our load," in so far as that expression refers to the Divine act rather than the Divine heart, is that He breathes into us the strength by which we can carry the heavy task of duties, and can endure the crushing pressure of our sorrows. And all the endurance of the saints is God in them bearing their burdens. Notice, too, "*daily* beareth," or, as the Hebrew has it yet more emphatically because more simply, "day by day beareth." He travels with us, in the greatness of His might and the long suffering of His unwearied patience, through all our tribulation, and as He has "borne and carried" His people "all the days of old," so, at each new recurrence of new weights, He is with us still. Like some river that runs by the wayside and ever cheers the traveller on the dusty path with its music, and offers its waters to cool his thirsty lips, so, day by day, in the slow iteration of our lingering sorrows, and in the monotonous recurrence of our habitual duties, there is with us the ever-present help of the Ancient of Days, who measures out daily strength for the daily load, and never sends the one without proffering the other.

III.—So, again, notice here the remarkable anticipation of the very heart of the Gospel.

"The God who daily beareth our burdens," says the Psalmist. He spoke deeper things than he knew, and was wiser than he understood. For the hope that gleams in these words comes to fulfilment in Him of whom it was written in prophetic anticipation, so clear and definite that it reads like historical narrative—"He bare our grief and carried our sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Ah! It were of small avail to know a God that bore the burden of our sorrows and the load of our duties, if we did not know a God who bore the weight of our sins. For that is the real crushing weight that breaks men's hearts and bows them to the earth. So the New Testament, with its message of a Christ on whom is laid the whole pressure of the world's sin, is the deepest fulfilment of the great words of my text.

IV.—Note, lastly, what we should therefore do with our burdens.

First, we should cast them on God, and *let* Him carry them. He cannot unless we do. One sometimes sees a petulant and self-confident little child staggering along with some heavy burden by the parent's side, but pushing away the hand that is put out to help it to carry its load. And that is what too many of us do when God says to us, "Here, my child, let Me help you. I will take the heavy end of it, and do you take the light one." "Cast thy burden upon the Lord"—and do it by

faith, by simple trust in Him, by making real to yourselves the fact of His Divine sympathy, and His sure presence to aid and to sustain.

Having thus let Him carry the weight, do not you try to carry it too. As our good old hymn has it—

"Why should I the burden bear?"

It is a great deal more God's affair than yours. We have, indeed, in a sense, to carry it. "Every man shall bear his own burden." The weight of duty is not to be indolently shoved off our shoulders on to His, saying, "Let Him do the work." We have indeed to carry the weight of sorrow. There is no use trying to deny its bitterness and its burden, and it would not be well for us that it should be less bitter and less heavy. In many lands the habit prevails, especially amongst the women, of carrying heavy loads on their heads; and all travellers tell us that the practice gives a dignity and a grace to the carriage, and a freedom and a swing to the gait, which nothing else will do. Depend upon it, that so much of our burdens of work and weariness as is left to us, after we have cast them upon Him, is intended to strengthen and ennoble us. But do not let there be the gnawings of anxiety. Do not let there be the self-torment of aimless prognostications of evil. Do not let there be the chewing of the bitter morsel of irrevocable sorrows; but fling all upon God. And remember what the Master has said, and His servant has repeated: "Take no

anxious care . . . for your heavenly Father knoweth"; "Cast your anxiety upon Him, for He careth for you."

And the last advice that comes from my text is, to see that your tongues are not silent in that great hymn of praise which ought to go up to "the Lord that daily beareth our burdens." He wants only our trust and our thanks, and is best paid by the praise of our love and of our heaping still more upon His ever strong and ready arm. Bless the Lord, who beareth our burdens, and see that you give Him yours to bear. Listen to Him that hath said, "Come unto Me all ye that . . . are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

London: Alexander & Shepheard, Ltd., Printers, Norwich St., E.C.

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